

**Scrutiny - Executive Response**

**In Respect of:** Scrutiny Review on Homelessness and Housing

**Date:**

**Response of:** Councillor Gerald Cooney, Executive Member (Housing, Planning and Employment)

**Coordinating Officer:** Ian Saxon, Director of Place

Recommendations	Accepted/ Rejected	Executive Response	Officer Responsible	Action By (Date)
1. That Scrutiny ask the Executive to monitor the local impacts of the decision to withdraw eviction relief. That any concerns of vulnerability, inequality and increased incidence of homelessness, (local voice and experience), add to a written response to the appropriate Government Office to inform future policy in this area.				

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<p>2. That the Council prioritise and undertake a review of existing policies and mechanisms relating to local allocation and nomination arrangements with Registered Social Landlords. That future work in this area aims to improve transparency and accountability of decision making, with the need to generate and secure housing placements above that of recent years.</p>				
<p>3. With additional preventative responsibilities placed on the Council to actively identify and mitigate the associated risks of homelessness. That enhanced recording of homelessness demand, temporary accommodation and housing placements, is essential to recognise pressures within the system, to act on them promptly and effectively with greater accountability across all responsible parties. To routinely assess and review the overall success, impact and outcomes of interventions, to include financial appraisal of cost benefit analysis and value for money principles.</p>				

Recommendations	Accepted/ Rejected	Executive Response	Officer Responsible	Action By (Date)
<p>4. That the Council's current Homelessness Strategy (2018-2021) is updated for 2022 and beyond, with a review of strategic priorities undertaken on an annual basis, taking account of national and local pressures and to achieve greater alignment with objectives set within the new local Housing Strategy.</p>				
<p>5. That the Council reviews current monitoring tools to assess the effectiveness of homelessness interventions and how the service identifies, records and monitors future homelessness preventions and outcomes for residents.</p>				
<p>6. That the Council looks to target a reduction in the time residents are housed in temporary and short-term accommodation, with consideration to a more ambitious and cooperative pathway to secure housing solutions within a maximum timeframe.</p>				

Recommendations	Accepted/ Rejected	Executive Response	Officer Responsible	Action By (Date)
<p>7. In addition to the work with RSLs, that attention is placed on developing the Council's partnership with the private rented sector across the short and long-term. To secure greater capacity for sustainable housing placements and accommodation options; and methods to engage and support vulnerable tenants at the earliest opportunity.</p>				
<p>8. That the Executive look to prevent any delay in future decision-making linked with previous ambitions to improve quality and standards in the private rented sector; and to connect with regional schemes aimed to promote best practice and build partnerships with the private rented sector.</p>				

### 1. BACKGROUND

- 1.1 The Council's Place and External Relations Scrutiny Panel has undertaken a review of strategic priorities for homelessness and housing. Research and activity has identified a range of existing and emerging pressures, with consideration for the role and ongoing effectiveness of statutory and non-statutory services in preventing homelessness and methods aimed to improve access to quality housing.
- 1.2 Covid-19 has and may continue to exacerbate a range of existing health and economic inequalities, with demand on services becoming increasingly difficult to predict. A number of identified risks to homelessness link closely with disproportionate outcomes for residents currently housed in the private rented sector.
- 1.3 The Council has a legal duty to provide residents with housing support and advice. It remains important that the assessment and decision making process identifies the range of factors that lead to individuals and families becoming homeless.

### 2. SUMMARY

- 2.1 This report summarises and concludes activity undertaken by the Place and External Relations Scrutiny Panel during the period September to December 2021. As part of the process, Scrutiny has:
  - Completed a desktop review of homelessness and housing, informed by the emerging national picture and growing concerns highlighted for the accessibility of quality housing and risks of homelessness. A report tabled at the meeting of Overview Panel on 27 September 2021, attached as **APPENDIX 3**.
  - Met with Councillor Gerald Cooney, Executive Member, Housing, Planning and Employment; Ian Saxon, Director of Place; Gregg Stott, Assistant Director, Investment, Development and Housing; and John Gregory, Head of Community Safety and Homelessness, to receive an update in response to the Scrutiny desktop review of homelessness at the formal Scrutiny Panel on 2 November 2021.
  - Submitted a number of questions to the Executive for response. The three areas below have remained in place as key strands that Scrutiny aims to seek assurance and focus its attention towards improving outcomes for residents.
    - Homelessness – statutory responsibilities and wider preventative work
    - Housing access to public and private rent
    - Private rented sector and improving quality
- 2.2 The report puts forward a number of recommendations to the Executive.

### 3. KEY FINDINGS

#### National Picture

- 3.1 The health and economic impacts of Covid-19 have placed added pressure to residents on low income and those paying disproportionately high housing costs. People on low income, in receipt of benefits, with a disability, refugees and single parents, or people with protected characteristics set within the Equality Act are more likely to be affected by what is widely referred to as a housing emergency, leading to homelessness for some.
- 3.2 It is estimated that one in three adults in Britain do not have a safe or secure home, with the high cost of housing being the main cause of homelessness. Regulation in this area has not substantially changed since 1988.

- 3.3 The homelessness response to the pandemic has seen a range of actions taken to safeguard individuals and families, non-more so than a decision of Government to place a temporary ban on Section 21, no fault evictions.
- 3.4 This much-needed intervention, at the time, appeared as a first step towards addressing a growing need to protect the most vulnerable and to tackle homelessness in the long-term. This includes:
- Bringing forward the Governments pledge to end 'no fault evictions'
  - Improve protection through the welfare system
  - Ensuring councils have enough resources to support households at risk of homelessness
  - Support for renters in arrears by increasing the funding for Discretionary Housing Payments, and amending how they are administered
  - Protecting people from harm: re-align Local Housing Allowance rates with local rents
  - Building more homes for social/affordable rent
- 3.5 In May 2021 the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) announced that the temporary protection from eviction would cease, with no plans to extend or adapt legislation. At the time, leading bodies including the Joseph Rowntree Foundation (JRF) warned of significant risks during recovery from the pandemic and a disproportionate concern for renters. JRF reported that on the day the eviction ban was lifted their survey revealed:
- Around 400,000 renting households have either been served an eviction notice or had been told they may be evicted.
  - Around 1 million renting households are worried of eviction in the next 3 months.
  - 1.7 million renting households are worried about paying their rent in the next 3 months.
- 3.6 Successful partnerships, multiagency working, system changes and increased funding have all come about during the pandemic. This is something that needs to continue throughout recovery phases. Housing associations can be part of the recovery work and ensuring a sustainable end to homelessness requires adequate funding, with the need for updated national guidance and policy.

### **Local Picture**

- 3.7 **Homelessness** - The Homelessness Reduction Act was introduced on 3 April 2018. The Act was a significant change for council's with the objective to help more people earlier, to prevent homelessness as much as possible and to help find accommodation for people who have become homeless. This has increased the range of people the Council is expected to support and the type of services it provides. In particular, the Act introduced assessments for people who ask for help and new duties to help people retain or find accommodation.
- 3.8 In addition to existing homelessness demand there is now a projected need for local authorities and partners to support a flow of people at risk of losing their home. There has become an increasingly common view to place homelessness as a priority factor within long-term and emergency planning for local authorities
- 3.9 Individuals and families living in temporary accommodation are often in overcrowded conditions where it is difficult to self-isolate and maintain social distancing. At 7 December 2021, there were 213 individuals placed in temporary accommodation by the Council, with the average length of staying being 179 days. The properties and facilities used to house individuals and families is diverse, limited and not always fit for purpose for long periods.
- 3.10 **Access to housing** - The Council has recently developed and adopted a new Housing Strategy. Whilst the authority has no housing stock it has a duty to ensure an effective scheme is in place for the allocation of social housing placements and a policy that prioritises households in 'Reasonable Preference'.

- 3.11 With around 1,800 social homes let in Tameside each year, the Council can decide who qualifies for waiting lists. It is important to review such a policy in effort to ensure it remains fit for purpose and is framed in a way that supports vulnerable and priorities groups, where necessary and appropriate and set within boundaries of the Public Sector Equality Duty.
- 3.12 A Registered Provider Partnership is to be established in Tameside, with strategic priorities to address:
- Supported Housing
  - Housing management / Homelessness / Allocations and Nominations
  - Growth and Development
  - Place Making / Regeneration / Town Centres
- 3.13 Included within the wider aims of the partnership is to deliver new homes, specialist housing, improve quality in the private rented sector and to assist with homelessness prevention.
- 3.14 **Private rented sector (PRS)** – The sector has a substantial impact on Tameside and the Council's priority areas including population health, community safety and homelessness.
- 3.15 In 2019, Scrutiny reviewed methods to improve quality and standards in the PRS. The review looked at a variety of options available to the Council that included the use of a selective licensing scheme. Scrutiny appreciated that the impacts of Covid-19 have delayed work in this area.
- 3.16 The PRS in Tameside has grown over recent years, with 14.2% of all properties (2017) being privately rented. This equates to almost 15,000 households and 40,000 residents, of which 12,000 are children. It is estimated that the number of private rentals has risen further over recent years.
- 3.17 Tameside's low income households and single parents continue to be adversely affected by the impacts of welfare reform and Universal Credit. This also includes housing elements such as the Local Housing Allowance and pressures placed on single people in receipt of the shared room rate who continue to face limited housing options.
- 3.18 Tameside Housing Advice is a frontline service that provides residents with help and advice for all aspects of housing and directly supports individuals and families to resolve housing problems. The demand for advice and support is increasing, with the following data drawn from 2018/19.
- 657 households accepted as being owed a homeless relief duty or main homeless duty.
  - 276 households homeless or at risk of being made homeless as result of loss of property in PRS.
  - 97 households became homeless as result of loss of property in PRS (Section 21 notices).

#### 4. CONCLUSIONS

- 4.1 Covid-19 appears to have highlighted and exacerbated a range of issues set within outdated national legislation in protecting vulnerable residents at risk of eviction. This presents a vital role for Government to prevent any future delay in developing a new and sustainable national framework for tenants and landlords alike.
- 4.2 The removal of temporary measures aimed to safeguard vulnerable residents from eviction and homelessness continues to present an added level of uncertainty and risk while impacts of Covid-19 remain present within all communities.
- 4.3 Strategic priorities for homelessness and access to accommodation has changed significantly since the Council's existing homelessness strategy was developed in 2018.

- 4.4 The Council has a continued role to prevent crisis demand of homelessness in the housing sector. It is therefore pleasing to see that a local Registered Provider Partnership is to become a key driver for work specific to homelessness and access to suitable housing and accommodation for vulnerable residents.
- 4.5 There is a continuing need to prevent homelessness and to provide greater access to safe, affordable and quality homes.
- 4.6 The Council currently has range tools and policies available and at its disposal to improve access to housing options through existing allocation and nomination arrangements with RSLs.
- 4.7 The PRS has a significant role to play within the future supply of temporary accommodation and the provision of long-term housing solutions.

## **5. RECOMMENDATIONS**

- 5.1 That Scrutiny ask the Executive to monitor the local impacts of the decision to withdraw eviction relief. That any concerns of vulnerability, inequality and increased incidence of homelessness, (local voice and experience), add to a written response to the appropriate Government Office to inform future policy in this area.
- 5.2 That the Council prioritise and undertake a review of existing policies and mechanisms relating to local allocation and nomination arrangements with Registered Social Landlords. That future work in this area aims to improve transparency and accountability of decision making, with the need to generate and secure housing placements above that of recent years.
- 5.3 With additional preventative responsibilities placed on the Council to actively identify and mitigate the associated risks of homelessness. That enhanced recording of homelessness demand, temporary accommodation and housing placements, is essential to recognise pressures within the system, to act on them promptly and effectively with greater accountability across all responsible parties. To routinely assess and review the overall success, impact and outcomes of interventions, to include financial appraisal of cost benefit analysis and value for money principles.
- 5.4 That the Council's current Homelessness Strategy (2018-2021) is updated for 2022 and beyond, with a review of strategic priorities undertaken on an annual basis, taking account of national and local pressures and to achieve greater alignment with objectives set within the new local Housing Strategy.
- 5.5 That the Council reviews current monitoring tools to assess the effectiveness of homelessness interventions and how the service identifies, records and monitors future homelessness preventions and outcomes for residents.
- 5.6 That the Council looks to target a reduction in the time residents are housed in temporary and short-term accommodation, with consideration to a more ambitious and cooperative pathway to secure housing solutions within a maximum timeframe.
- 5.7 In addition to the work with RSLs, that attention is placed on developing the Council's partnership with the private rented sector across the short and long-term. To secure greater capacity for sustainable housing placements and accommodation options; and methods to engage and support vulnerable tenants at the earliest opportunity.
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regional schemes aimed to promote best practice and build partnerships with the private rented sector.