

Report to: Overview Panel

Date: Tuesday, 1 August 2023

Reporting Officer: Emma Varnam – Assistant Director, Operations and Neighbourhoods

Subject: **MORE HOME TRUTHS - LESSONS LEARNED FROM THE HOMELESSNESS REDUCTION ACT**

Report Summary: The Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman (LGSCO) published a report in March 2023 which highlighted significant learning and areas of improvement from complaints that had been received since the introduction of Homelessness Reduction Act in 2017. The act gives local housing authorities new duties and powers to help people who are homeless or threatened with homelessness. Most significantly, it created what are commonly referred to as the prevention and relief duties, a responsibility to help more people and sooner in their housing journey. Whilst the LGSCO recognised the financial pressure that local authorities are facing, he identified common administrative mistakes, process failures and poor communication, all of which added to the distress of individuals at a very stressful time.

The report at **Appendix 1**, provides a clear explanation of the duty. It uses case studies to highlight common issues, and examples of best practice. The report provides example questions for Scrutiny Panels to ask of their local authority Homelessness Service. The responses to those questions from Tameside’s Homelessness Service are provided at **Appendix 2**.

Recommendations: That the Overview Panel note the responses by the Homelessness Team to the questions by Scrutiny.

Corporate Plan: The responses will inform the development and ongoing monitoring and delivery of the Homeless Strategy as priority within the Corporate Plan.

Policy Implications: The recommendations of the LGSCO have implications in terms of the quality of homelessness services and the delivery against the duties of the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017.

Financial Implications: This is not a decision making report and there are no direct financial implications arising as a result. The following financial information is provided for context.

(Authorised by the statutory Section 151 Officer & Chief Finance Officer) The table below shows the financial position of the Tameside Housing Advice Service that is the main focus of this report.

Tameside Housing Advice Service	22/23 Outturn £m	23/24 Budget £m	23/24 Forecast £m
Contracted Service Provision*	0.100	0.000	0.000
Employees	0.504	0.609	0.938
Temporary Accommodation (net cost)	3.276	1.136	3.188
Other Expenditure	0.116	0.149	0.122

Total Expenditure	3.996	1.894	4.248
Grant Income	(0.498)	0.000	(0.463)
Other Income	(0.045)	(0.045)	(0.045)
Total Income	(0.543)	(0.045)	(0.508)
Net Position	3.453	1.849	3.740

The current position for 23/24 is a forecasted overspend of £1.981m. This is as a result of continuing increases in demand for temporary accommodation.

Appendix 2 of this report notes various improvements to the current service that are either underway or being considered:

- **Increased Focus on Prevention Work**

As well as improving outcomes for residents, homelessness prevention work results in lower costs to the Council as a result of reduced demand for temporary accommodation. One example is that of payment of arrears or financial assistance to access private rented accommodation. In the first quarter of 23/24 42 families or individuals have received the benefit of a financial measure to prevent homelessness at an average cost of £1,375. If these families hadn't benefitted from this assistance and had instead entered temporary accommodation, the same amount would have covered 22 nights with any stay longer than that representing a greater cost to the Council.

- **Service Review**

The service review is expected to be carried out within this financial year and will seek to address capacity gaps and also increase the focus on prevention work. As part of this, consideration will be given to the budget available and also the potential for additional posts, particularly around Homelessness Prevention, to reduce the Temporary Accommodation costs incurred by the Council as outlined above.

Any other changes considered as a result of this report should also evaluate the potential to improvement in service delivery and outcomes alongside the budget available and potential for cost avoidance to the Council, as well as ensuring any necessary approval is sought.

**Legal Implications:
(Authorised by the
Borough Solicitor)**

Part 7 of the Housing Act 1996 and the Homelessness Code of Guidance for Local Authorities (the Code) sets out the council's powers and duties to people who are eligible and homeless or threatened with homelessness.

These have since been extended by the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017 which provided additional duties and powers. It gave local housing authorities further duties and powers to help more people who are homeless or threatened with homelessness and to provide help earlier.

The report provides helpful learning and guidance for the council to consider, to ensure that services are being delivered compliantly and effectively.


Risk Management:

Failure to adopt the recommendations of the LGSCO will have significant wellbeing risks for individuals and families as well as

organisational risks in terms of additional demands in other high cost specialist services.

Access to Information: Not confidential

The background papers relating to this report can be inspected by contacting Emma Varnam, Assistant Director

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