

Title of meeting:	Cabinet
Date of meeting:	9 th September
Subject:	Response to the Housing & Social Care Scrutiny Panel review of the provision of temporary accommodation
Report by:	Paul Fielding - Assistant Director - Housing
Wards affected:	All
Key decision:	No
Full Council decision:	No

1. Purpose of report

1.1. The Housing & Social Care Scrutiny Panel has conducted a review into how well Portsmouth City Council is providing temporary accommodation for those who are homeless and the council has a duty towards. The purpose of this report is to set out the response of the officers to the Scrutiny Panel's recommendations.

2. Recommendations

2.1. That the Panel is thanked for its work in undertaking the review.

2.2. That the Cabinet notes and supports the recommendations of the review, which are listed in section 8 of the report and the response of officers which are set out in section 4 of this report.

3. Background

3.1. At June 2018 the number of households in temporary accommodation across England was 82,310, up 5% from June 2017, and up 71% from December 2010 (MCHLG 2018).

3.2. The council has statutory duties towards those who are homeless, or at threat of homelessness. Homeless means more than those sleeping rough on the streets. Most who are legally defined as homeless have not been sleeping rough.

3.3. If homeless people approach the council for support, it has a legal duty to assess their case and reasonable steps to help the applicant to secure accommodation (and prevent the homelessness). 'Helping to secure' does not mean that the council has a duty to directly source and provide accommodation for the applicant. Instead, authorities should provide 'support and advice to applicants who are taking some responsibility for securing their own accommodation'.

3.4. Whilst being fully assessed, or waiting for move on accommodation, there may be a duty to provide a placement (a placement being a family, couple or single person temporary home. This is referred to as Temporary Accommodation.

- 3.5. The council has a range of places it can temporarily house people, including properties owned by the council and leased properties. This currently provided homes for approximately 55 placements.
- 3.6. Placements are not classified as tenants. They are housed on licence and have different rights to those who hold a tenancy.
- 3.7. The number of households placed in temporary accommodation has risen from 58 in April 2017 to 119 in February 2019 (and 130 in July 2019). This figure rose sharply in the early part of summer 2018 following the introduction of the Homeless Reduction Act 2018 and the urgent need to decant two sizeable tower blocks.
- 3.8. To manage this problem the council uses B&B and chain hotels (such as Travelodge). These types of 'emergency' accommodation cost a lot more than more traditional forms of TA and can be an unsettling environment for the customer
- 3.9. Although the total number of households in temporary accommodation has risen there has only been a slight increase in the number of households being placed each week (from an average of 6.7 placements per week to an average of 7.4 per week)
- 3.10. The predominant issue has been a lack of movement through temporary accommodation into more permanent settled accommodation leading to longer stays in temporary accommodation and a 'backlog' effect.

4. Response to panel's recommendations

- 4.1. Recommendation 1. The turnaround period for empty council properties be reduced.

Response. Agreed - Officers agree that when local authority housing tenants give notice to leave a property, the process to make it available again for the next tenant must be as efficient and effective as possible. A systems thinking intervention into this area has been completed and a new way of working is being rolled into the area officers which will result in housing officers taking responsibility for the process of handling empty properties. The new way of working focusses on reducing the end to end time taken for an empty property to be let and the early indications are showing a reduction in the time taken.

- 4.2. Recommendation 2. Opportunities to use vacant public sector buildings as temporary accommodation be investigated including locations such as Edinburgh House.

Response. Agreed - Officers from across the council will work together to investigate any empty properties and their suitability to be used as temporary accommodation whilst they wait to be redeveloped.

- 4.3. Recommendation 3. The council continue to making block bookings for emergency accommodation in hotels and B&Bs to reduce costs and uncertainty.

Response. Agreed (where appropriate) - The number of suitable B&B and hotels available for the council to use as temporary accommodation is constantly reviewed to ensure that budgets are spent as wisely as possible. Block bookings will be used as appropriate whilst also maintaining a range of available accommodation in a variety of locations.

4.4. Recommendation 4. Housing Associations be encouraged to work together to allocate properties to people on the council's temporary accommodation waiting list.

Response. Partially agreed - The city council currently works with, and manages the housing allocation list for, a number of housing associations. This means that allocations are made, where appropriate, to those on the council's list, some of whom may be in temporary accommodation. The Housing Needs, Advice & Support service will continue to work with housing associations to maximise the number of social homes that are available to those who are homeless. However housing associations are not best placed to deal with those who need temporary accommodation. Instead the council is using the relaunched private sector leasing scheme, and increasing its own properties, to reduce the need for emergency temporary accommodation such as hotels.

4.5. Recommendation 5. The council continue to take all the opportunities it has to develop social and affordable housing particularly additional council housing through the Housing Revenue Account now that the borrowing cap has been removed.

Response. Agreed - The Housing, Neighbourhood and Buildings Services Directorate works closely with the Regeneration Directorate to realise the development opportunities available to PCC. The recent housing cabinet decision meeting on the 30th July 2019 agreed the development of council housing on the vacant Doyle Avenue site. The development uses HRA borrowing and right to buy receipts to create a social housing development. In addition the council has agreed an Empty Private Property Strategy which aims to bring more empty properties back into use, is developing the Southsea Community Centre for into housing and continue to buy back properties which have previously been sold under the Right to Buy scheme.

5. Equality impact assessment

5.1. No specific changes arise from this report. However an EIA would be produced for each specific scheme or policy change which would arise from this work.

6. Legal implications

6.1. This is contained within section 9 of the panel's report

7. Director of Finance's comments

7.1. This is contained with section 10 of the panel's report

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Signed by:

Background list of documents: Section 100D of the Local Government Act 1972

The following documents disclose facts or matters, which have been relied upon to a material extent by the author in preparing this report:

Title of document	Location
Housing Act 1996	
Homelessness Act 2002	
Homeless Reduction Act 2017	

The recommendation(s) set out above were approved/ approved as amended/ deferred/ rejected by on

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Signed by: