

PART A

Report to: Overview and Scrutiny Committee
Date of meeting: 5th March 2015
Report of: Head of Community & Customer Services
Title: WBC Housing Services Moving Forwards

1.0 SUMMARY

- 1.1 The housing services currently provided by the WBC Housing Section include:
- Provision of Housing Advice and Homelessness Prevention Casework
 - Commissioning the Outreach Service for Rough Sleepers
 - Statutory Homelessness investigation and provision of temporary accommodation
 - Management of the Housing Register and Choice Based Lettings Scheme
 - Enabling access to the private rented sector through the HomeLet Scheme
 - Strategic work including the Housing Strategy, Homelessness Strategy, Tenancy Strategy, Private Sector Renewal Policy and co-ordinating key partnerships such as POSH (Prevention of Homelessness Partnership)
 - Managing the administration of Disabled Facilities Grants
 - Working with Registered Providers and developers to facilitate new or re-commissioned affordable housing provision
- 1.2 We find ourselves in unprecedented times with regard to the pressures on housing in Watford, and the South East of England in general. Commentary on the housing shortage has received a lot of political and media attention and has brought into focus both homelessness and rough sleepers. The Housing Infographic, January 2015 in Appendix A provides the data on these issues, both of which have seen rises in Watford over the last 12 months.
- 1.3 This report will focus on the current issues, excluding the new Nominations Policy which will come to this Committee in its own right later this year, and set out what is currently in progress or what is planned to address these issues.

2.0 RECOMMENDATIONS

- 2.1 That the Committee note the report

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3.0 DETAILED PROPOSAL

- 3.1 Figure 1 of the Infographic in Appendix A shows the increasing number of homeless households in temporary accommodation over the last couple of years. Whilst there are many reasons for this rising number, such as the ending of private rented sector tenancies, fewer social tenancies available, there is no one single solution. The Housing Section will work with potentially homeless people to try and find a solution to their current situation to help them from becoming homeless. However where this is unsuccessful, or where the Section is approached at a point where interventions will not help then consideration has to be given as to whether the Council has a statutory duty to these households, and if it does if those households have a priority need.
- 3.2 Given this pressure on the Council's temporary accommodation a piece of work has been commissioned to look at the current and near future requirements for temporary accommodation for Watford. This review will look at the current arrangements and make recommendations for future provision including the nature and type of provision, the location (which may not always be within the Borough of Watford) and the facilities within the provision. This review is expected to be completed during the summer.
- 3.3 Figure 2 of the Infographic in Appendix A shows the increasing number of rough sleepers in Watford over the last few years. Whilst some of this increase can be put down to the change in how the numbers are recorded there is clearly an underlying upwards trend. Again there is no single reason why this has occurred however the wider economic impacts of recent times will have a part to play.
- 3.4 The Council works very closely with New Hope, one of the largest providers of homelessness services in the Home Counties, and commissions them to undertake Outreach work to these rough sleepers to help them back on their feet again. The Council receives monthly updates on progress with these clients and other organisations are involved as required.
- 3.5 Figure 3 of the Infographic in Appendix A shows the number of homes built in Watford over the last few years. Total numbers are very strong and above the annual target set out in the Core Strategy. However, Watford's popularity as a town to live has increased and as London house purchase / rental prices increase so Watford becomes more affordable. These are but two of the many pressures on housing supply in Watford.
- 3.6 The Council has been very pro-active in identifying and promoting potential sites for housing in its Core Strategy and in the current Local Plan Part 2 consultation, however there is always a need to find a balance between competing demands for any development land.
- 3.7 Figure 5 of the Infographic in Appendix A shows the decreasing number of properties available through the Council's HomeLet scheme. Again there are many reasons for this reduction and it is clear that for any solutions to housing issues in the Borough effective engagement with the private rented sector is essential. The Council already has regular contact with HomeLet landlords and operates a Landlords Forum in partnership with the National Landlords Association. The new Housing Section Head will be expected to have experience of working with the private rented sector and will take the lead on exploring all opportunities for enhanced working between private

sector landlords and the Housing Section.

- 3.8 In conclusion, these are times of increased pressure in many aspects of housing in Watford. The Council is aware of these pressures and is using both tried and tested and new arrangements / methods to try and address these.

Appendices

Housing Infographic, January 2015

Background Papers

No papers were used in the preparation of this report

File Reference

None