

OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

8th November 2023

Title: Housing for Vulnerable People: Update Report	
Report of the Director of Children’s and Adults’ Services	
Open Report	For Information
Wards Affected: All	Key Decision: No
Report Author:	Contact Details:
Accountable Strategic Leadership Director: Elaine Allegretti, Strategic Director for Children’s and Adults’ Services	
Summary In September 2019, Corporate Strategy Group endorsed the Housing for Vulnerable People programme, led by Inclusive Growth and Community Solutions, to support the whole Council, but primarily Childrens’ and Adults’ Services. This programme was focussed on understanding demand, aligning this with supply, and creating effective and joined up processes around the provision of accommodation for vulnerable cohorts. This report provides an update on this programme of work.	
Recommendation(s) The Overview and Scrutiny Committee is recommended to note the update provided and following the presentation, discuss any issues that need further exploration with officers.	
Reason(s) The Overview and Scrutiny Committee requested a progress update be given on the vulnerable housing programme, and this report seeks to provide that. The matters discussed within this report also relate to the Council priorities of “Prevention, Independence and Resilience”.	

1. Introduction and Background

- 1.1 In September 2019, Corporate Strategy Group endorsed the Housing for Vulnerable People programme. Led by Inclusive Growth and Community Solutions, this programme was focussed on understanding demand, aligning this with supply, and creating effective and joined up processes around the provision of accommodation for vulnerable cohorts. While the programme recognised that vulnerability could stem from a wide range of potentially overlapping factors, its focus has been on the provision of housing for members of the following cohorts:

- People with mental health difficulties;
- People with disabilities;
- Older People;
- Care Leavers;
- Households with vulnerable children; and
- Homeless 16/17-year-olds.

1.2 The stated aim of the programme was to deliver savings and value for money for the council and improved outcomes for vulnerable people. In the 4 years that the programme has been running progress has been made. Its successes have largely been with the establishment of embedded operational processes and joint-working practices between different service areas within the council.

1.3 An update on the Vulnerable Housing Programme went to Corporate Strategy Group in March 2022 which outlined the work undertaken to that date and made recommendations about the priorities going forward. This report made recommendations across 5 workstreams:

Workstream 1: Demand modelling – financial and people

Deliver robust demand modelling that can be reviewed and revisited regularly as the population and or policy changes to ensure it is kept up-to-date and responsive.

Workstream 2: Process and operational improvements

Create new processes and enhance existing process around allocation, placements, lettings, and move-on planning.

Workstream 3: Ratification and monitoring of housing pathways

Joint agreement of the overall process and user journey – connecting demand, process, policy, and supply

Workstream 4: Policy

Ensure the needs and aspirations of vulnerable residents are captured in relevant policy and strategy frameworks, with policies clearly articulating how the available supply is apportioned to ensure that we are using our available resources in the best possible way.

Workstream 5: Supply

Deliver accommodation supply, through the Be First and HRA new build programmes, to meet the needs of the demand models and the pathways articulated in this programme and reduce both the resource and financial implications for Care and Support in particular.

1.4 As well as the recommendations by workstream, the review also recommended a project management resource to drive forward this work. The review further recommended dedicated resource to progress the care leavers work. The resource to deliver the care leavers work is in place, with the scope widening to include other vulnerable children groups. However there is no project management capacity for

this programme. This has narrowed the scope of the programme to focus on the operational workstreams (workstreams 1-3) which are discussed in this report.

- 1.5 Despite the scope of the Vulnerable Housing Programme reducing, the programme has embedded a culture of joint-working and built stronger relationships across services. Principles of joint working have also been strengthened in the processes that have been established through the programme, including accommodation panels and regular working groups such as the Housing for 16–25-Year-Olds Strategic Working Group

2. Demand Modelling- Financial and People

- 2.1 Prior to the Vulnerable Housing Programme data was held across services about vulnerable groups, but there was little understanding of the pressures across the whole system or a united response to the issues identified. The work of the programme has enabled a better understanding of these demands and facilitated joint work across Care & Support and Community Solutions to focus on areas which deliver the best value in terms of either cost avoidance or improved outcomes for residents, or ideally both. This information was then used to allocate resources funded through the income generated.

- 2.2 In terms of modelling the following table provides a picture of measures at the start of the programme compared to the current position in response to care leavers:

Programme Start	Current Position	Outcome/s
147 care leavers in paid-for accommodation	71 care leavers in paid-for accommodation (51.7% reduction) 20 further social tenancies becoming available between Nov 23-Jul 24	201 care leavers moved from paid for accommodation in period*. 127 moves into a social housing option and 74 into a private sector/other offer. Work represents cost avoidance of £1,680,533.90 on placement costs over the period Target to reduce paid-for number to under 65 by year end (55.8% reduction)
No electronic rent accounts	Electronic rent accounts for all placements	Generates income of £182,182 per year

*It is necessary to move more than 2 young people for the number to decrease, to account for the number that will turn 18 and join the cohort in the period.

- 2.3 The report to CSG in March 2022 identified that in terms of demand modelling the priorities for the next period of the programme should be:

- The programme should include a push to explore opportunities for future demand modelling, including the potential for OneView to produce insight into vulnerable households;

- A more structured approach to accommodation panels across the whole of Care and Support, promoted to the staff to utilise with cases referred on a regular basis for step down; and
- Electronic rent accounts should be introduced for residents in supported accommodation (mainly within the Mental Health Service) to mirror the process that has been introduced for Care Leavers.

2.4 In terms of the priorities identified, the following progress has been made:

Priority	Progress	Next Steps
Oneview to produce demand modelling insight to inform strategic planning	Forecasting demand in CSC and ASC over the coming 5 years	Analysis being used to resource plan
More structured approach to accommodation panels	Administration and recording of panels in place providing clear record of cases and outcomes agreed	Reporting lines for information produced need to be confirmed to ensure oversight of work
Electronic rent accounts (mental health)	Agreed priority and clear on work required but resource issues have prevented delivery	Business case for additional resource to be made on invest to save basis

3. Process and Operational Improvements

3.1 There have been process and operational improvements since the last review of the Vulnerable Housing Programme in March 2022. These are shown below:

	Improvement Identified	Progress
Mental Health supported step-down	Strategic plan mirroring that for care leavers to be developed with regular operational meetings to track progress	Identified those customers ready for move-on and regular meetings taking place to progress this
Homeless 16-17 year olds	Inconsistent recording of joint assessments and non-compliance with protocol	Face to face training sessions booked and work on-going to improve recording system for staff and quality assurance mechanisms
Accessible Housing	Lack of clarity around the matching and prioritisation of households requiring accessible accommodation	Joint matching and prioritisation of households now in place.
Households with vulnerable children	Routine process to problem solve cases where housing required to support social care step-down or prevent escalation	Vulnerable childrens' panel meeting monthly and processes for referrals clear to teams
Vulnerable perpetrators of ASB	Clarity around circumstances in which eviction would be considered for vulnerable residents acting antisocially	Clear process of case review and consultation between ASB Team and support services now in place.

3.2 It is recognised that there remains work to be done. The current key priorities in terms of process and operational improvement are:

- Speed of providing specific adaptations for households delaying move-in to accessible housing- This is being addressed through the matching of properties before being ready to let, providing a greater lead-in time for these adaptations to be completed. Exploring opportunities to deliver before handover process and as part of build;
- Homeless 16-17 year olds and recording- system changes and face-to-face training are being delivered to improve the recording of joint assessments and compliance with the protocol; and
- Identifying resource to enable work on the mental health cohort- it is recognised that the speed of work in this area has not matched that of care leavers, which has dedicated resource funded through the income generated through rents. This model is being developed for the mental health cohort, albeit at a smaller scale.

4. Ratification and Monitoring of Housing Pathways

- 4.1 The current housing allocations policy was agreed by Cabinet in 2020 with one of the key changes being the ability to make direct offers of accommodation to vulnerable groups (section 34.0). Housing panels across key vulnerable groups were set-up to identify and prioritise any vulnerable households who required support outside of the allocations bidding process.
- 4.2 When the Vulnerable Housing Programme was reviewed in 2022 it was recognised that the key success of the programme to that point was that it had facilitated this joint work across services to address the needs of some of our most vulnerable residents. There are accommodation panels for vulnerable children, accessible housing and mental health and each works in a similar way; with the service working with the household identifying them as having a housing need which cannot be addressed through other means and nominating them for discussion. The panel develops a plan for the family in terms of the housing options available.
- 4.2 Cases heard at the Vulnerable Childrens' Panel are usually to prevent placement, enable step-down from placement or to facilitate either a foster care or family placement of a child or children. The case study below is an example of a vulnerable housing panel case where children leaving foster care back to the care of their mother was being prevented by mum not having suitable accommodation. This case study shows the benefits of this approach to families and also to the Council.
- 4.3 Case Study
- AA suffered a mental health episode and was hospitalised. During admission AA's 2 children were placed in foster care. AA lost accommodation during her stay in hospital. AA left hospital and secured accommodation with family and continued her recovery, working with her social worker who assessed her as ready to return to caring for her children with support, as long as AA had suitable accommodation. Case came to Vulnerable Children Panel as the family required self-contained accommodation close to support network quickly to facilitate step-down from foster care placement. Direct offer of accommodation in Barking made close to childrens' school and family support in scheme with security and on-site support.
- This outcome had positive impacts on the family as mum was able to care for her children and re-build their relationship. There were also significant benefits to the Council in terms of the reduced placement costs. Two children in a foster care placement costs around £1194 a week.
- 4..4 The review of the Vulnerable Housing Programme in 2022 recommended that there was a more structured approach to the accommodation panels and this has been implemented. The panels have an administrative resource and clear records of the cases discussed and actions agreed, the process for referral is clear and those present have the authority to enact the decisions made. It has been identified that the onward reporting of the work of the accommodation panels could be improved to highlight the good work in this area, and this is being progressed.

5. Conclusions and Next Steps

5.1 The work around the Vulnerable Housing Programme continues with the operational priorities over the next six months being:

- Improvements to the process for adaptations to accessible units;
- Improvements to recording joint assessments for homeless 16-17 year olds;
- Mental health cohort- step-downs and rent accounts; and
- Ensuring the lines of governance for the accommodation panels are clear.

5.2 Furthermore the LAC Sufficiency Strategy provides detail on our plans for care leavers in particular. Ofsted recently gave LBBD a 'good' rating for our work with care leavers, which includes our Local Offer to Care Leavers, in which their accommodation options are contained. Ofsted said:

'The accommodation needs of care leavers, including those who are coming out of custody, are well met. A significant number of care leavers secure tenancies in housing association properties, enabling their move into accommodation. Tenancy support helps to prevent tenancy breakdown. Practical, emotional and budgeting assistance also helps care leavers manage their finances and transition to adulthood successfully.'

5.3 Whilst we are extremely proud of the quality of our Local Offer to Care Leavers, we continue to strive for improvement, with the following workstreams underway:

- **Rent Guarantor Scheme**

Cabinet agreed a rent guarantor scheme for Care Leavers, whereby we, as corporate parents, act as guarantors for their private rental agreements. So far, we have had limited uptake, in part because of improvements in moving care leavers into LBBD housing, but we are working to better publicise this offer.

- **Vineries procurement strategy**

In addition to the duties set out for care leavers, the Council also has additional duties as outlined in the Southwark Judgement (case law) which places a duty on children's social care to assess young people aged 16 and 17 who present to the Local Authority as homeless. Following assessment, if the young person is assessed as a 'child in need' and if so, requires accommodation, the young person must be accommodated under section 20 of Children Act 1989.

LBBD has a Homeless 16/17-year-old Joint Working Protocol which is a partnership response to how both Children's Care and Support services will work with the Homeless Prevention Team within Community Solutions when a 16 or 17 year presents as homeless. The protocol works towards a trauma informed approach which aims to get those YP at risk, the right assistance as soon as they need it.

The Vineries is our provision of choice for these young people as the service provides 24-hour provision offering low to medium support (5 hours per week) which enables the young person to receive accommodation and support. All

customers are given individual tenancy agreements provided by the Housing provider – Clarion Housing.

This service will be retendered in 2024.

- **Ofsted Regulation**

Ofsted began registering previously unregulated providers from 28 April 2023 and it became mandatory for all providers from 28 October 2023. Any supported accommodation provider accommodating a looked after child or care leaver aged 16 or 17 must be registered with Ofsted prior to this date or they will be committing an offence. There is a transitional period whereby providers who submit a full application to Ofsted before 28 October 2023 can continue to operate until that application has been determined.

Under the new regulations, providers will also be required to complete a review of the support they are offering young people every six months. This review will have to include the views and experiences of the children and young people living in the accommodation and will be used to make sure the accommodation meets the needs of everyone who lives there. Reviews will be submitted to Ofsted, which will inspect accommodation at least once every three years.

Commissioners have been monitoring the registration process and supporting our providers and currently all our providers have applied for registration. We continue to monitor this as we use new providers.

- **Habitat House Project**

Prior to September 2019, the Council owned several dilapidated flats above shops within its General Fund portfolio which were incapable of being commercially let as returning the upper parts back into use would have required significant capital investment.

At the time, the Empty Property Unit investigated proposals that would address this and an approach to a global charitable community housing group called Habitat for Humanity was proposed that offered a possible solution. As a result of subsequent discussions with HfH, a pilot project was proposed at 35b East Street Barking, which refurbished properties that were subsequently let to vulnerable people (in this case, unaccompanied asylum-seeking children (UASC), care leavers from the Children's Care & Support Service), who would use the properties for independent living.

HfH was chosen because they were a global charity who provide decent, affordable homes for vulnerable people in housing need in locally appropriate ways around the world. This revolves around their values of empowerment and partnership by engaging different sectors of society (voluntary, private and public) in helping communities to provide local solutions to housing and community needs. HfH work in London carrying out a range of construction-based projects to bring empty and underused buildings back into good community use as affordable rented homes for groups in local need such as vulnerable women and disadvantage youth. HfH have secured grant funding

from nationwide foundations to provide on-site construction skills training for young people in colleges to learn practical on-site construction skills. This unique model is therefore more than just a construction related project as the method of delivery, provides much wider social and community value working with an ethical and responsible partner with access to interest free grant funding.

The model is aimed at bringing back into use several properties in poor condition, whilst creating social and community benefits during the construction phase and providing accommodation for care leavers. This was the model used at the pilot project at 35b East Street and was the model to be adopted on the three additional properties agreed by Cabinet in September 2019 (496 Gale Street, 16a Woodward Road and 4-5 Royal Parade).

Due to the success of the pilot scheme at East Street and the three schemes within Phase 1, it is proposed that the scheme is expanded to a further 2 properties with the possibility of a (subject to current discussions HfH), which if all were completed, would have the potential to have a portfolio of 7 properties (see next slide) which would support an additional 16 care leavers / UASC

5.3 Decisions need to be reached about the elements of the Vulnerable People's Housing Project not covered in the workstreams discussed in this report and what can be continued in the current financial climate. There remains the ambition to make improvements for our vulnerable residents. These ambitions include:

- Project management resource to drive strategic work;
- Asset review of sheltered sites to identify opportunities to repurpose stock for other vulnerable groups;
- Extensions programme to existing stock;
- A decision-making matrix laying out the process to be followed when it is identified that projects currently underway are not delivering sufficient adapted housing at the right rates; and
- Be-First working closely with services to review the households on the waiting list and build properties in line with their needs.

6. Financial Implications

6.1 Funding for the continuation for the Housing for Vulnerable People Programme has been met through existing budgets.

7. Legal Implications

7.1 The Vulnerable Housing Programme was developed to support the Council's statutory obligations under social, homeless and housing legislation. This includes housing/homelessness duties under Part 7 of the Housing Act 1996 and powers and responsibilities under the Childrens Act 1989.

Public Background Papers Used in the Preparation of the Report: None

List of appendices: None