



AGENDA ITEM:
SUMMARY

Report for:	<u>Housing and Communities Overview and Scrutiny Committee</u>
Date of meeting:	21 March 2018
PART:	1
If Part II, reason:	

Title of report:	London Homelessness Issues and the Impact on Dacorum Borough Council
Contact:	Cllr Margaret Griffiths – Portfolio Holder for Housing Cynthia Hayford – Homeless Prevention & Assessment Team Leader
Purpose of report:	The purpose of this report is to provide the Housing & Communities Overview & Scrutiny Committee with a briefing on the issues the Council is facing with regards to London Boroughs making placements in the borough, impacting on the ability to prevent homelessness.
Recommendations	1. For members to note the implications of the outlined challenges and impacting Dacorum’s response to preventing and tackling homelessness; in particular the growing demands on the council’s homelessness service.
Corporate objectives:	Preventing and tackling homelessness contributes to the follow corporate objectives: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A clean, safe and enjoyable environment • Building strong and vibrant communities • Providing good quality affordable homes, in particular for those most in need
Implications:	Increased number of approaches to the authority as families placed in the area would gain local connection with the Council within 6-12 months (in line with Housing Act 1996, Part VII). Ongoing management of properties, in relation to anti-social behaviour activity and property condition.

Risk Implications	The Housing Service's Operational Risk Register is presented to the Committee on a quarterly basis.
Equalities Implications	Community Impact Assessment carried out for 2016-2020 Homelessness strategy
Health And Safety Implications	There are no direct Health and Safety implications arising from this report.
Consultees:	Cllr Margaret Griffiths – Portfolio Holder for Housing Mark Gaynor – Corporate Director Housing and Regeneration Elliott Brooks – Assistant Director Housing Natasha Beresford – Group Manager, Strategic Housing
Background papers:	N/A
Glossary of acronyms and any other abbreviations used in this report:	LHA – Local Housing Allowance

1. Introduction

- 1.1 In October 2016 the new Preventing and Tackling Homelessness Strategy 2016 – 2020 was presented to the Housing and Communities Overview and Scrutiny Committee (H&COSC).
- 1.2 It was agreed that H&COSC would monitor the Housing Service's performance against the five commitments set out within the strategy.
- 1.3 The purpose of this report is to provide the H&COSC with a briefing on the issues the Council is facing with regards to London Boroughs making placements in the borough, impacting on the Council's ability to prevent homelessness.

2. London Homelessness issues

- 2.1 The Localism Act 2011 gave Housing Authorities the power to discharge their main homelessness duty into private sector properties. This marked the beginning of out of borough placements by some London Housing Authorities.
- 2.2 The effects however on Housing authorities like Dacorum Borough Council was not felt initially. In 2016 out of borough placements increased within the Dacorum area, enabling the placing borough to fulfil their requirements for temporary accommodation, discharge of homeless duty and for the prevention of homelessness as well.

- 2.3 Housing Authorities such as Brent, Barnet and Southwark Councils offer large sums of money to their homeless families and encourage them to seek alternative accommodation outside London. The Council is aware that Brent in particular has purchased properties in the Dacorum area to enable them to fulfil their duties towards homeless households.
- 2.4 In 2017 there was an increase in London authorities approaching landlords in the Dacorum area, offering large monetary incentives take on their properties. This provided an increasing challenge for DBC, competing for the same properties and looking to grow the property portfolio of the Help to Rent Scheme. Many of these properties are leased to the authority for a period between 3 and 5 years, which means that rent is paid even when the property is not occupied. This provides the landlord with a far greater financial assurance than Dacorum is able to offer. Additionally repairs to the property were dealt with by the managing authority and not the landlord.
- 2.5 Brent Council have also recently started buying their own properties and letting them out to their clients as temporary accommodation. DBC has recently been contacted by Brent Council, offering their services to lease some of their larger 4 bedroom properties as temporary accommodation.
- 2.6 Hightown Praetorian Housing association have established a Private Sector Leasing scheme in the last 12 months. They had sought to engage Dacorum in this scheme, however due to the high rents being charged (many in excess of Local Housing Allowance levels), DBC cannot use these properties to prevent homelessness as the accommodation is not considered affordable for our clients. For example Hightown was offering the Council 1 bed properties for £775 per month when the LHA rate for 1 bed in Dacorum is £677. 2 bedroom properties were being offered at £1100 per month with LHA rates for 2 bed properties at £855 per month. Neighbouring district Watford, with higher LHA rates is using these properties and discharging their homelessness duty into them, in some cases, they are paying large monetary incentives to secure the properties.
- 2.7 The act of out of area placements made by other boroughs in the Dacorum area has several impacts for the Council. Where there have been anti-social behaviour issues occurring, this has resulted in an increase in workload for our Anti-Social Behaviour Team. An example of this would be a property in Grovehill. A family was placed there by Brent Council a couple of years ago and there have been complaints about noisy parties, fights, drugs and littering in the area. The team are still involved and have been attending meetings with various partners to try and resolve the issues. There is also another family that was placed by the same authority in a different property in Grovehill; this family have now been evicted by the landlord due to drugs dealing from the property. Additionally the greater monetary incentives on offer to our local landlords, reduces the ability for DBC to be able to recruit new landlords to the Help to Rent Scheme and prevent homelessness via the private rented sector.
- 2.8 Additionally it is important to note that clients placed into the Dacorum area by an out of area local authority, will start to accrue a local connection with this borough, meaning that in future if their housing situation changes and they approach the Council, they may

meet the local connection criteria under Part 6 (Allocations) and Part 7 (Homelessness) of the Housing Act 1996, meaning that Dacorum Borough Council may have a duty to provide assistance.

3. Conclusion

- 3.1 The Strategic Housing Service is now responsible for the management and regulation of Private Rented Sector stock within the Dacorum area. An evaluation of the Help to Rent Scheme is underway to consider the effectiveness of the scheme when working with landlords in the Dacorum area. Additionally as part of the wider approach to managing the private sector in Dacorum, a review of how the Council can work in partnership to improve the management and regulation of housing stock and landlords in the area. Through improved methods of engagement and insight into this area, it will be possible to establish a more effective route to accessing private sector accommodation to prevent homelessness in Dacorum and reduce the reliance on social housing stock.
- 3.2 The use of out of borough placements by London Boroughs and other councils is both reducing the availability of private renting that the Council can use for temporary accommodation or as full discharge of homelessness duties and having an upward impact on rent levels to the point where there is concern that they exceed LHA levels, above which housing benefit is not payable.

4. Recommendations

For members to consider the update in full and offer comments on the report.