



HOUSING COMMITTEE OFFICER REPORT

Housing Advice Team & Homelessness Services

The following is a briefing note for Members on the activities of the Council's Housing Advice Team.

Introduction:

The Council's Housing Advice Team is located within the Communities Directorate and delivers services relating to housing advice, homelessness prevention, HomeseekerPlus (the Council's choice-based lettings system) and statutory homelessness functions. The wider Housing Solutions service also covers rough sleeper services, international migration including Homes for Ukraine as well as facilitating housing-related support, special needs housing and providing the Council's strategic housing and housing enabling functions.

The Housing Advice Team works extensively with other council departments such as Tenant Services, Revenues and Benefits, and Environmental Health along with a wide range of other partners in the statutory and voluntary sectors. The Housing Advice Team aims to deliver a service which is person-centred and compassionate, recognising that access to decent and safe housing is fundamental to every household's wellbeing, whilst acknowledging that we are not always able to provide the exact housing outcomes that our clients may be seeking.

Case Numbers:

Given the changes to the global and financial operating environment, Members will not be surprised to learn that case numbers are rising while access to affordable homes is diminishing. Locally, housing benefit rates have failed to keep pace with private sector rents, meaning that the private sector is largely inaccessible to anyone on a modest income. As a result, demand for Council and Housing Association properties far outstrips supply, and there are over 3500 households on HomeseekerPlus. Allocations of properties are made strictly according to the adopted Homeseeker policy, which aims to house people according to the urgency of their need.

The team receives over 1500 phone calls per month, plus around 1000 emails. In addition, the team report that cases are increasing in their complexity due to the additional pressures of the cost-of-living crisis.

Homelessness:	20/21	21/22	22/23	Year to date
Presentations	688	736	938	358
Acceptances	46	123	144	18
Temporary Accommodation placements	106	118	158	72



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In addition to the above, the Team receives around 75 MP enquiries per annum, plus a further 75 Freedom of Information requests, often from journalists or researchers. These enquiries of course take time to respond to.

Current Pressures:

Housing Advice and Homelessness is acknowledged as a high-pressure area of work, but one which is highly regarded by members of staff because of their ability to contribute positively to the community and make a difference to people's lives. However, with pressures and case numbers steadily increasing there is a need to ensure that the team is resilient and able to respond positively to future challenges. As a result, a service review is taking place to ensure that the team is properly resourced, and that those resources are utilised in the best possible way.

Future Plans:

The Housing Advice Team has an ambition to take part in more proactive projects in areas such as working with private sector landlords and other accommodation providers to maximise accommodation options for those in housing need. We are also looking to relaunch the Homelessness Forum in order to work more closely with our external partners.

REPORT SUBMITTED BY	Pippa Stroud
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