

STROUD DISTRICT COUNCIL

HOUSING COMMITTEE

TUESDAY 25 JUNE 2024

Report Title	Temporary Accommodation Strategy 2024-27			
Purpose of Report	To inform Housing Committee of the Councils current approach to providing emergency accommodation to homeless households and to present a strategy to change the Councils temporary accommodation delivery model and grow provision of temporary accommodation in the district.			
Decision(s)	The Committee RESOLVES to approve the temporary accommodation strategy			
Consultation and Feedback	The document has been shared with senior management, all relevant officers that have a lead role in implementing the strategy and with front line staff that have experience of making emergency accommodation placements.			
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Options	The Council has a statutory duty to provide emergency accommodation. The alternative to adopting this policy is to continue to deliver emergency accommodation as we currently do, but as highlighted in the document, this is an expensive and risky approach.			
Background Papers	None			
Appendices	Appendix A – Temporary Accommodation Action Plan Appendix B – Temporary Accommodation Success Metrics			
Implications (further details at the end of the report)	Financial	Legal	Equality	Environmental
	Yes	Yes	No	No

1. Introduction / Background

- 1.1 The Housing Act 1996 (as amended) sets out that Local Authorities have a statutory duty to provide emergency accommodation to those where the authorities have a reason to believe that the person is considered to be eligible, homeless and in priority need. The “reason to believe” threshold is low, meaning the Council must provide interim accommodation to a large number of households and individuals that are homeless. In addition, where there are no duties that are owed, local authorities can provide temporary accommodation under a power instead. This power is usually exercised during periods of extreme weather.
- 1.2 The Councils current approach to providing emergency temporary accommodation is predominately through private hotels. Due to the nature of homelessness, it can be difficult to predict when a household will need emergency accommodation and therefore placements into hotels are often made at short notice and the location of the placement is

reliant on availability at that time. Placements of this nature are often outside of the district as a result due to the lack of suitable, available accommodation in the district.

- 1.3 In addition to using hotel accommodation, the Council use 6 units of accommodation as temporary accommodation, 3 of which are a legacy of the pandemic and are due to return to general needs accommodation when the current occupants leave. The Council have referral rights to the 5 units at Citadel House in Stroud, which was commissioned and grant funded by the Council and is managed by Gloucester City Homes, but other than these properties, the majority of emergency accommodation placements are in hotels.
- 1.4 This approach, which is to rely on private proprietors, represents risks to the council and does not provide support to households during their time of instability. As the demand for hotel provision increases, not just for Stroud but surrounding local authorities, the availability of these rooms decreases. Most placements into hotels are at short notice and depend on availability and are at the discretion of the owner not ending the booking with little or no notice. When events such as the Cheltenham Gold Cup take place, availability of accommodation reduces further meaning it is more difficult to secure accommodation and often a placement is further away from the district. This is disruptive to the homeless applicant, reduces access to support network and is not good practice.
- 1.5 There are financial risks of providing emergency housing in this way. Across the country a number of local authorities are reporting financial concern due to the increasing costs of meeting their statutory accommodation duties. During 2023-24 the Council exceeded its budget allocation of £500,000 for emergency accommodation. There is a national trend of increased homeless applications and those needing emergency accommodation, and this is similar in Stroud.
- 1.6 The current delivery model will continue the increasing trend of higher gross and net spend on hotel provision. The Council remain at the discretion of private providers and the risk of increased costs per nightly paid placement and it is recommended the Council consider alternative delivery models.

2. TEMPORARY ACCOMMODATION STRATEGY

- 2.1 The temporary accommodation strategy sets out the current picture of our emergency accommodation use and risks in more detail. It also proposes an initial 3-year strategy to deliver a new model of temporary accommodation provision.
- 2.2 The proposal is to deliver temporary accommodation within the Council's stock and provide the management of the placements through the housing service. The team have the tenancy management skills, expertise and experience of managing licenses and tenancies and those in precarious housing situations. In addition, the recent service structure review of our tenancy management service has ensured that the management of temporary accommodation is within the job profile of our Tenancy & Sustainment Officers which aligns with a new approach to temporary accommodation.
- 2.3 The strategy proposes to use some of our current general needs properties as temporary accommodation. To identify suitable units a project group will be formed to review specific housing units to ensure we are getting the best use of our stock and target properties that have historically been hard to let to ensure we are minimising rent loss.
- 2.4 It is acknowledged that using general needs properties for the temporary accommodation purpose will slightly reduce our stock of general needs property in the short term, but this will mean that it reduces reliance on hotels, improve customer service and start to reduce

the financial risk on the authority. This is to be considered a temporary measure whilst we review options to increase supply by delivering new units.

- 2.5 The strategy sets out to achieve and deliver additional units, utilising existing parcels of Council owned land where financially viable and achievable. A cross department team will consider the use of garage sites and whether modular units could be delivered for temporary accommodation. The lead time for this kind of project is approximately 24 months and as units became available, general need properties could be returned to general needs as the modular units would replace them for the purpose of temporary accommodation.

3. CONCLUSION

- 3.1 The current method of meeting the Councils statutory accommodation duties is to use a small number of Council owned properties (up to 6 units), 5 units with Gloucester City Homes that were commissioned, and grant funded by the Council and the remaining placements through private hotels on a nightly paid basis.
- 3.2 During 2023-24 £634,000 gross was spent on emergency accommodation provision. Whilst the Council receive government grant funding for the prevention of homelessness, this level of spend is not sustainable, it does not represent best practice and has a detrimental impact on those in need of homeless services.
- 3.3 The Council's temporary accommodation strategy is designed to mitigate the financial risk to the Council whilst delivering an improved model of emergency accommodation that supports local people to remain in the district so that they can stay close to their support network, tailors support to residents and gives them the opportunity to move onto longer term housing.

4. Implications

4.1 Financial Implications

The cost of providing temporary and emergency accommodation has increased significantly in recent years, due to an increase in demand. This cost is a General Fund cost, rather than a Housing Revenue Account (HRA).

This report sets out the position and puts forward a strategy and action plan which would aim to reduce cost to the General Fund, whilst maintaining or improving the level of service offered. Where an increase in provision is proposed for the HRA, it would be done so that the HRA is financially reimbursed through the payment of rents and service charges (expected to be predominantly through a Housing Benefit claim by the household). Any areas of upfront cost would need to return back through Housing Committee, Strategy and Resources Committee and Council to allocate a budget and set out how this would be funded.

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4.2 Legal Implications

As set out in paragraph 1.1, the Housing Act 1996 (as amended) sets out that Local Authorities have a statutory duty to provide emergency accommodation to those where the authorities have a reason to believe that the person is considered to be eligible, homeless and in priority need.

Under the current strategy, the Council uses mostly external accommodation to meet this need. The proposed new strategy will enable the Council to meet these needs by using more accommodation under its own ownership, thus lowering the risk of the Council not being able to meet its obligations and lowering costs.

The Council is looking to achieve this by a combination of reutilising existing housing, acquiring new housing accommodation and repurposing existing sites.

Under section 17 of the Housing Act 1985, the Council has the power to:

- (a) acquire land as a site for the erection of houses,
- (b) acquire houses, or buildings which may be made suitable as houses, together with any land occupied with the houses or buildings,
- (c) acquire land proposed to be used for any purpose authorised by sections 11, 12 and 15(1) (facilities provided in connection with housing accommodation), and
- (d) acquire land in order to carry out on it works for the purpose of, or connected with, the alteration, enlarging, repair or improvement of an adjoining house.

In the event that the Council opts to develop existing (non-housing) sites for housing accommodation, planning implications must be considered and appropriate planning permission will need to be obtained.

One Legal

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4.3 Equality Implications

An EIA has been carried out by Officers in relation to the decision made in this report and no equality implications arise. The decision to accommodate individuals or families into temporary accommodation is a legislative directive and applies to all that meet the criteria. The proposals in this strategy are intended to positively enhance the offer to all households that meet the qualification criteria set out in the legislation.

4.4 Environmental Implications

There are no significant implications within this category.