



**Service Delivery
Committee**

**Tuesday, 17 January
2017**

Matter for Information

Title: Homelessness Reduction Bill Update

Author: Steve Nash (Housing Services Manager)

1. Introduction

- 1.1 To update Members on the Homelessness Reduction Bill which the Department of Communities and Local Government consider will receive royal assent by April 2017 and will be enacted by the end of 2017.

2. Recommendations

- 2.1 To note implications of the Homeless Reduction Bill
- 2.2 To note the impact on the Housing Options Team due to the increased level of homelessness as outlined in paragraph 4.

3. Information

The Homelessness Reduction Act started life as a private members bill which gained government support in October 2016. Subject to further Parliamentary progress it is likely to come into force after April 2017.

The main changes of the Bill areas follows:

Homelessness prevention duty

The Homelessness Reduction Bill will require local housing authorities (LHAs) to take reasonable steps to help prevent any eligible person who is at risk of homelessness from becoming homeless. This means either helping them to stay in their current accommodation or helping them to find a new place to live. The Bill extends the period for which people are considered threatened with homelessness from 28 days to 56 days before they are likely to become homeless, ensuring that LHAs can intervene earlier to avert a crisis.

This measure will extend homelessness prevention so that help is provided at an earlier stage to all eligible households, regardless of priority need status, intentionality and whether they have a local connection.

Comment: This change means that formal applications and assessments will take place much earlier than present which will increase caseloads for Officers.

Duty to assess all eligible applicants' cases and agree a plan

This measure will require local housing authorities (LHAs) to carry out an assessment of all cases where an eligible applicant is homeless, or at risk of becoming homeless. Following this assessment the LHA must work with the person who has applied for help, to agree the actions to be taken by both parties to ensure the person has and is able to retain suitable accommodation. Of these actions, there will be a small number of key steps the individual would be required to take. These steps would be tailored to their needs and be those most relevant to securing and keeping accommodation. These actions must be reasonable and

achievable.

Comment: This will mean Officers having to enter in detailed agreements with applicants, produce plans, monitor progress and review plans as necessary. The time spent on cases will inevitably increase.

Private tenants (subject to landlord notices to bring tenancies to an end) will have to be dealt with, in most cases, just before or upon expiry of the notice.

Comment: This reflects the good practice already issued by government and is something Officers already work towards.

A new duty to help secure accommodation for all eligible applicants regardless of their 'priority' and regardless of being 'intentionally' homeless over a 56 day period.

Homelessness relief is action taken to help resolve homelessness. If a person is already homeless, for example if they have sought help from the local housing authority (LHA) at a late stage or if homelessness prevention work has not been successful, they will be owed the relief duty.

The relief duty requires LHAs to take reasonable steps to help secure accommodation for any eligible person who is homeless. This help could be, for example, the provision of a rent deposit or debt advice.

The duty lasts for up to 56 days, and would be available to all those who are eligible. Those who have a priority need (for example they have dependent children or are vulnerable in some way) will be provided with interim accommodation whilst the LHA carries out the reasonable steps. Those not in priority need will receive help and assistance for 56 days.

Comment:

Cessation of this duty for applicants not afforded the 'main' homelessness duty will trigger the right of an additional statutory review which will increase Officer workloads.

For applicants in 'priority need' who are 'intentionally' homeless temporary accommodation will have to be provided for twice as long, this will increase temporary accommodation costs.

Local Connection for Care Leavers

This measure will ensure that a young homeless care leaver has a local connection to the area of the local authority that looked after them or, if it is different, the area where they normally live and have lived for at least 2 years including some time before they reached 16. This will make it easier for them to get help in whichever of these areas they feel most at home.

Comment: This will allow any care leaver from Leicestershire to apply to the Borough for assistance if homeless.

Successful Grant Funding

The Council with partners notably the other Leicestershire District and Borough Councils alongside Leicester City Council have been successful in securing nearly £700 000 of government grant funding to provide 1 new service and to improve a second service.

Working alongside Leicester City Council, Officers will be involved in a new Homeless Prevention Trailblazer project that will seek to provide a Universal Access Point for initial Homeless Prevention advice. In the case of borough residents the advice will be tailored to the Oadby & Wigston locality.

Working with Charnwood Borough Council, Officers will be looking to improve and extend the current 'No Second Night Out' scheme aimed at trying to prevent single homeless people from becoming entrenched and problematic rough sleepers. This will build upon the successes of both of the separate City and County 'No Second Night Out' schemes (the County scheme was potentially due to close in March 2017).

A Proposed New Family Hostel

Members are informed that it is intended to bring before a future Planning Committee a proposal to change Belmont House (a property adjacent the Council Offices on Station Road, Wigston) from residential use to use as a homeless hostel for families to help reduce the cost of temporary accommodation.

Implications for Housing Options Team

From October 2014 until September 2015 Housing Options dealt with 94 statutory homeless applications, accommodated 45 households in emergency accommodation and dealt with 282 approaches for housing advice.

In the following 12 months 2015-2016 statutory homeless applications increased by 47% to 138, households in temporary accommodation increased by 51% to 68 cases and approaches for advice by 15% to 323. The indications are that the trend will continue upwards.

Upon coming into force the changes will increase both workloads and the use of temporary accommodation.

This arises because of the additional steps that will have to be taken in every case. It is estimated that casework will increase threefold when the more detailed discussions, agreements and case monitoring and review are taken into account.

Temporary accommodation will see increased costs as the length of time which 'intentional' homeless households in priority need will have to be accommodated will double. It is estimated this will add approximately £21,000 to the costs.

Background Documents:-

None

Email: steve.nash@oadby-wigston.gov.uk

Tel: (0116) 257 2662

Implications	
Financial (CR)	CR1 Decreasing financial resources - Costs of new hostel, additional staffing costs.
Legal (AC)	CR5 Effective utilisation of assets/buildings - Adherence to Homeless Reduction Bill, Planning Permission required regarding change of use for Homeless Hostel
Risk (SG)	CR4 Reputation damage - If Council unable to fulfil its statutory obligations.
Equalities (SG)	Not relevant at this stage.
	Equality Assessment:-
	<input type="checkbox"/> Initial Screening <input type="checkbox"/> Full Assessment <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Not Applicable