

Written response to:

Business and Transformation Scrutiny Panel

Resolution:

That the Homeless Prevention and Accommodation Manager provide the Panel with a written response giving further details on the income shortfall for homeless accommodation due to Covid-19.

Written response from:

Homeless Prevention and Accommodation Manager

Response:

In response to Covid-19 Public Health England and MHCLG guidance and operational risks in safely managing shared accommodation, 21 of the 50 directly managed units of emergency temporary accommodation are temporarily out of use to reduce contact risks; with additional deep cleaning measures impacting on the availability / turnaround of other properties within the portfolio. Provision for higher risk areas such as domestic Abuse, DDA, safe house provision and self-isolation for those confirmed as covid positive or hospital discharges remain available within the available units and are responsive to meet local needs.

Occupancy in quarter 1 (01 April – 30 June 20) was 124% (based on 29 units); and compared to the same period for 2019 this is an increase of 75%. Increased demand for emergency accommodation has been managed without incurring additional units (and costs) by maximising timely move on options to maintain throughput within the existing provision.

Bed and breakfast locally has been incredibly limited due to the complex needs of the clients and appropriateness of placements; the only placements arranged to date has been on behalf of the national probation services funded by the Ministry of Justice. Should this provision have been made available to this cohort, this would have incurred a considerable additional cost burden on the council, as there is no MHCLG funding to cover the cost of this and this is not fully recoverable through housing benefit.

Increased expenditure to support transitional moves, removal costs, clearing arrears, rent in advance, deposits, furnishings, mobile phones, travel etc. has been funded to date using existing annual external grant funding to support homelessness.

Specifically, in relation to Covid-19 to date, Carlisle City Council Homelessness Service has received:

- £1,650 from MHCLG to support rough sleepers placed as a result of covid (this was the maximum amount allocated based on 2019 rough sleeping snapshot figure)
- £5,000 from Cumbria County Council to provide additional support for non-statutory placements in emergency accommodation during C19

Despite the loss in potential income from reduced TA units and the ongoing challenges maintaining high levels of throughput to manage occupancy, this contingency has certainly worked very well in terms of managing a safe service through this emergency period by limiting direct contacts and enabling the service to operate safely sustaining staffing levels 24 hours a day. This is critical to ensure that those with higher support needs can continue to access support to sustain accommodation placements – especially when support is limited or being delivered in differing ways from other agencies; and those with more complex substance misuse or mental health issues not complying with government guidance in relation to social distancing. It also enables the service to have a contingency to move women and families into safely should there be an outbreak of more than two positive cases in the Water Street scheme.

We anticipate that this temporary safety position will remain in place until risk levels reduce or current guidance changes; this is being constantly monitored, reviewed and reported to MHCLG weekly.

Date: 28 September 2020