

Communities, Housing and Environment

19th July 2016

Is the final decision on the recommendations in this report to be made at this meeting?

Yes

Homelessness Performance Quarter One 2016/17

Final Decision-Maker	Communities, Housing and Environment
Lead Head of Service	John Littlemore
Lead Officer and Report Author	Ellie Kershaw
Classification	Public
Wards affected	All

This report makes the following recommendations to this Committee:

1. That the Committee notes the performance for quarter one 2016/17

This report relates to the following corporate priorities:

- Keeping Maidstone Borough an attractive place for all
- Securing a successful economy for Maidstone Borough

Timetable

Meeting	Date
Communities, Housing and Environment	19 th July 2016

Homelessness Performance Quarter One

1. PURPOSE OF REPORT AND EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- 1.1 The council has a statutory duty to provide housing advice and assistance, the scale of which will depend on each household's individual circumstances. Homelessness has been rising over the past few years, both locally and nationally. This has naturally led to an increase in work and expenditure for the council. It is therefore important that the Committee is kept apprised of up to date information.

2. INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

- 2.1 Over the past five years, Maidstone has seen a year on year increase in homelessness applications, from 84 in 2010/11 to 630 in 2015/16. The Committee therefore requested that quarterly information be provided concerning homelessness and the work that the council is undertaking.
- 2.2 Between April and June of 2016, 176 households have met the threshold to make a homelessness application. 149 decisions were made. In the same quarter in 2015/16 there were 150 applications and 132 decisions made. Therefore, it appears that over the year the figures are likely to be at least on a par with, if not higher than last financial year.
- 2.3 The Homelessness code of guidance suggests that where possible decisions should be made within 33 days. In quarter one 57% were made within this timeframe. There are two main reasons for this; the officers currently have a caseload of 30-40 each which is double the caseload that an officer can comfortably manage. In addition to this, there have been a number of cases where there have been complex financial matters to untangle. In many cases, the officer is reliant on the client bringing in information for them to assess and a number of clients have been slow in presenting this information. In order to assist with this issue, the use of credit checks to ascertain debt levels is currently being considered.
- 2.4 The high number of homelessness applications has an impact on the amount spent on temporary accommodation. The level at which the council must provide temporary accommodation pending investigation is a low standard; where the household is homeless, eligible, and the council has reason to believe they may be in priority need, the duty to ensure that suitable accommodation is available to the client pending investigation is triggered. This is a far lower test than 'being satisfied' that the household has a priority need. If a negative decision is reached, households in temporary accommodation must be given 'reasonable' time to vacate. This is usually between seven and 28 days. Finally, the highest proportion of time spent in temporary accommodation is by those households to whom the main housing duty is owed, but for whom suitable settled accommodation has not been identified. In the last quarter, for example,

two households who had been in temporary accommodation for 12 months were rehoused in settled accommodation.

- 2.5 In April and May, over £182,000 was spent on temporary accommodation (gross), which again is an increase on the £165,000 spent in the same quarter this year. A proportion of costs can be recovered through a reasonable charge to households. In the last quarter just over £119,000 was charged to households, with 96% of that having been collected at this time.
- 2.6 There are currently 72 households in nightly paid temporary accommodation with a further 12 in long term temporary accommodation. This is a significant decrease from the New Year when over 100 households were in nightly paid accommodation.
- 2.7 27 preventions were carried out in this quarter. A prevention is where someone threatened with homelessness does not become homeless and the authority has had some part in the reason why. For example, this could be liaison with friends, parents or a landlord, assisting the household to make an application for a discretionary housing payment or helping with a bond to secure a new property. The more preventions that can be carried out, the more people we can help at an earlier stage and the less it costs the council. Unfortunately this low figure (the target is 75) is an unavoidable consequence of having such a high number of active homelessness applications. Ways of being pro-active about prevention are being considered, such as approaching households who have applied for a discretionary housing payment, and those who we know will be subject to the benefit cap this year.

3. CROSS-CUTTING ISSUES AND IMPLICATIONS

None identified, report is for information only.

Issue	Implications	Sign-off
Impact on Corporate Priorities		[Head of Service or Manager]
Risk Management		[Head of Service or Manager]
Financial		[Section 151 Officer & Finance Team]
Staffing		[Head of Service]
Legal		[Legal Team]

Equality Impact Needs Assessment		[Policy & Information Manager]
Environmental/Sustainable Development		[Head of Service or Manager]
Community Safety		[Head of Service or Manager]
Human Rights Act		[Head of Service or Manager]
Procurement		[Head of Service & Section 151 Officer]
Asset Management		[Head of Service & Manager]