

DONCASTER METROPOLITAN BOROUGH COUNCIL  
REGENERATION & HOUSING OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY PANEL

WEDNESDAY, 13TH OCTOBER, 2021

A MEETING of the REGENERATION & HOUSING OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY PANEL was held at the COUNCIL CHAMBER, CIVIC OFFICE, DONCASTER on WEDNESDAY, 13TH OCTOBER, 2021 at 11.30 AM

PRESENT:

Chair - Councillor Majid Khan

Councillors David Nevett, Duncan Anderson, Iris Beech, Steve Cox, Sue Farmer, Sophie Liu and Gary Stapleton

ALSO IN ATTENDANCE:

Phil Holmes, Director Adults Health and Well-being  
Dave Richmond, Chief Executive St Leger Homes  
Mark Steward, Head of Service Access to Homes

APOLOGIES:

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor John Mounsey

		<u>ACTION</u>
1	<u>TO CONSIDER THE EXTENT, IF ANY, TO WHICH THE PUBLIC AND PRESS ARE TO BE EXCLUDED FROM THE MEETING.</u>	
	There were no items on the agenda.	
2	<u>DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST, IF ANY.</u>	
	There were no declarations made.	
3	<u>MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON 3RD MARCH, 2021</u>	
	<b>RESOLVED:</b> That the minutes of the meeting held on 3 <sup>rd</sup> March 2021, be agreed as a correct record.	
4.	<u>PUBLIC STATEMENTS</u>	
	There were no public statements made.	

5.

UPDATE ON TEMPORARY ACCOMMODATION USE AS PART OF HOMELESSNESS DELIVERY.

The Panel was presented with a report relating to homelessness and outlined the duty to provide temporary accommodation to certain prescribed groups, namely those with dependent children or deemed to be vulnerable.

Members were reminded of the increasing demand for temporary accommodation, which were twofold:

Firstly the additional duties for local authorities following the introduction of the Homelessness Reduction Act; and

secondly the 'Everyone In' programme as a result of the Corona Virus Pandemic ensuring all rough sleepers, including individuals who would not normally be owed a duty, to be provided temporary accommodation.

During discussion, the following areas were addressed by the Panel:

Good practice during the pandemic – it was stressed there was already a lot of good practice in Doncaster through partnership working and the complex lives alliance. This had provided a positive position at the beginning of the pandemic. The following areas were discussed.

- The partnership was able to utilise hotels within the borough. This was an area the partnership wished to develop as part of the supporting pathway model;
- The Tenancy Sustainment Team supported residents early with financial support to ensure they retained their tenancies and moving forward wished to continue supporting people early when in temporary accommodation, ensuring they were tenancy ready;
- Supporting people with rent payments in advance, including the development of rent guarantee schemes, was an area to investigate with the private sector;
- With regard to customer experience the number of people visiting the Civic Office with housing enquiries had reduced dramatically during the pandemic with telephone call activity increasing, and follow up responses on-line and email. It was hoped this would continue;
- Ex-prisoner housing – prior to the pandemic a South Yorkshire Offenders pathway had been developed where officers undertook housing assessments in prison as part of release and homing plans, but this was paused during lockdown with some assessments being undertaken by video call. There were some

benefits to the video calls, for example officer efficiency, however the level of engagement with the customer had reduced; and

- The Partnership's focus on people with early prevention avoiding homelessness as much as practicable.

Funding - success had been achieved in the areas detailed below however, it was noted that sustainability with regard to resources and long term support was difficult. Short term funding was continually being sought and the bureaucracy it created was noted. Having longer term funding would provide a more stable strategic approach.

- Rough Sleeper initiative – attracting substantial funding for rounds 3 and 4.
- short term support with the Next Steps accommodation fund / Protect Plus.
- Accommodation for ex-offenders achieved through the partnership approach. This ensured that no one left prison without a fixed abode, providing 12 weeks to secure a permanent home through accommodation schemes.

Homelessness enquiries received by St Leger Homes during Covid – it was noted that pre-pandemic there were approximately 500 enquiries per month but these were now averaging 2000 per month.

The reasons for homelessness during the pandemic were set out in paragraph 29 of the report, people presenting themselves as “homeless now”, for example fleeing domestic abuse or violence from outside the home. Therefore the opportunity to prevent homelessness was massively reduced with efforts being made to return to the levels pre-pandemic.

Domestic Violence - It was noted that homelessness could be a result of someone suffering from domestic abuse with safe accommodation required urgently. The difference between the indicators in the report were as follows:

Domestic Abuse: Violence within the home.

Fleeing Violence: Experiencing violence from outside the home.

Reasons for Homelessness – A Member highlighted that the information provided highlighted the last thing a person was doing before they presented themselves as homeless but it questioned what the root cause was for being homeless. It was acknowledged that homelessness was very complex for each individual and was very rarely triggered by one event. With regard to data collection and figures set out in the report, it was noted that the Government had introduced more categories to monitor, therefore the information

provided was driven by those indicators.

Supported accommodation – pressure on the system was acknowledged and had led to an increase in demand, therefore there was the requirement for more of every support service provided.

It was noted that broadly there was enough supported accommodation but it was not necessarily the best balance. For example, more bespoke and a mixed blend of housing was required.

With regard to the current adapted stock, it was explained that approximately 30% of the housing stock had been adapted but it was important to future proof design of the stock and get the right balance for both adaptations and general design issues.

Out of Authority rehousing – the Panel noted that placing someone in a home outside the Authority boundary was used as a last resort and very rare, or to ensure someone was safe from harm. Finding someone a property was a supply and demand issue, for example, during race week when all accommodation was booked by visitors, this may be a time when out of authority housing could be considered.

At all times the Authority ensure people stay local with their communities and support network however it was acknowledged there was a legal duty to find reasonable accommodation when someone presents themselves as homeless. To prevent the need for placement, a safe location in temporary accommodation where appropriate, close to networks needs to be allocated. If accommodation was not available then emergency accommodation would be sought in hotels however families being placed in hotels would be avoided as much as possible. If the above placements could not be made then accommodation outside the borough would be sought. Anyone placed outside the borough would only be temporary and the priority would be to return them to Doncaster Borough as quickly as possible. It was recognised that in some circumstances accommodation could be available within the Borough but may not be safe for the person seeking accommodation.

Housing Allocations – It was explained that there had been a massive rise in demand of people requiring local authority accommodation and the type of properties available tended to be static. For example, the number of houses becoming available reduced by 30% over the last year.

With regard to the “HomeChoice” banding system 95% of people who needed a home had been placed directly in the Gold and Platinum level over the last year. Therefore it had become more difficult to house people in the lower bands if they were seeking a specific tight geographical area. It was noted that the Allocations Policy would be reviewed in 2022 with a review of the use of housing stock being

considered in the future.

With regard to tenants being moved to a different property, because where they were living was deemed to be temporary, it was explained that the position was not the same for each person. If a person or family was happy to stay in the accommodation and it met their needs, they could remain. However, in some instances the balance may not be right, for example, if a three bedroomed property was required for the family and they were currently in a two bedroomed, then a measured approach would be required to move the family to the right property.

It was also explained that if people remained in temporary accommodation in areas that had a very low turnover, then temporary accommodation would reduce even further. A good spread was required to be provided across the Borough.

With regard to the percentage of people entering local authority housing from the private sector for non-payment of rent, it was agreed that a response would be provided following the meeting.

The Local Authority approaching the private sector to use temporary urgent accommodation was addressed, however it was noted that the sector was experiencing the same demand and need. It was also explained that unfortunately the private sector did not see people in Council properties as being in a stable economic position that could guarantee rent.

Rent Holiday - the Panel was reminded of this provision during the pandemic, for the people who needed it. It was acknowledged that some people were impacted severely but others remained in employment. It was noted that rent performance last year had improved on the previous year and the opinion was that people found themselves in a better position because they were not spending on holidays or going out and therefore prioritised paying rent and bills.

Nomination rights to non St Leger properties – it was explained that the question raised could not be answered at this meeting but noted that each scheme had an individual Agreement for housing rights. It was explained how the “HomeChoice” letting system worked within these Agreements.

Military veterans – in response to a question relating to a charity providing 10 bungalows to assist military veterans, it was explained that a response would be provided following the meeting.

It was explained that housing priority was provided for Doncaster’s veterans and they were automatically placed in Gold and Platinum bands when seeking accommodation. Doncaster’s Armed Forces Covenant and that Councillor Mark Houlbrook, Cabinet Member for

	<p>Sustainability add Waste was the Local Authority's Armed Forces Champion, was noted.</p> <p>A Member stressed that he was a veteran and feedback he had received was positive with regard to the Armed Forces Covenant and wished to record thanks for the support being provided.</p> <p><b><u>RESOLVED:</u></b> that the report and discussion, be noted.</p>	
6.	<p><b><u>OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY WORK PLAN AND THE COUNCIL'S FORWARD PLAN OF KEY DECISIONS</u></b></p>	
	<p>The Senior Governance Officer presented the Work Plan and Forward Plan for Key Decisions to the Panel for its consideration.</p> <p><b><u>RESOLVED:</u></b> that the Work Plan and Forward Plan of key decisions, be noted.</p>	