

**REPORT FOR: OVERVIEW AND  
SCRUTINY COMMITTEE**

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**Date of Meeting:** 8 June 2016

**Subject:** Homelessness Pressures

**Responsible Officer:** Lynne Pennington (Divisional Director of Housing )

**Scrutiny Lead  
Member area:** Cllr Jeff Anderson, Cllr Manji Kara  
Scrutiny Lead Members for  
Environment and Enterprise

**Exempt:** No

**Wards affected:** All

**Enclosures:** Appendix 1 Managing Homelessness  
Demand  
Appendix 1a Comparative  
Homelessness Activity Data

## **Section 1 – Summary and Recommendations**

This report sets out the background to the acute homelessness pressures being experienced in Harrow at present and demonstrates the work being done across the Council to manage demand and mitigate the impacts on the homeless households and on the Council's budgetary situation.

### **Recommendations:**

The Panel are asked to:

- Consider the report,
- Note the factors behind the current homelessness demand and
- Support the drive to manage customer expectations so that they are more realistic in relation to the Council's ability to secure affordable housing locally.

## **Section 2 – Report**

### **Introductory paragraph**

The draft scrutiny work programme has identified homelessness as a topic for 2016/7; members requested a comprehensive report to come to committee in June, as part of the process for defining the scope for a scrutiny project that doesn't duplicate other work going on in this field.

Members noted that homelessness is rated as an A1 risk for the Council and requested information on:

- the nature of the problem (who is presenting as homeless and the breakdown of housing need)
- what we are doing about it
- what factors are being taken into account for planning purposes
- whether our policies are preventing homelessness

### **Background and current situation**

In response to the on-going homelessness pressures the Community Directorate has initiated a round table project looking at the issue of homelessness, how demand is managed and also what might be done to stimulate supply. This report concentrates on the management of demand. See appendix for detailed information. There will be a short presentation to the meeting highlighting the main elements of the report.

A senior officer challenge panel was held on 25 May 2016 to look at how homelessness was managed and to identify whether any more actions could be taken corporately and with partners to mitigate the pressures. An action plan is being developed from that meeting.

The round table will reconvene in June to review progress on this and other aspects of the action plan in relation to supply initiatives.

The appendix references the work needed to make homeless applicants more realistic about the lack of affordable housing options in Harrow. This requires a concerted communication effort internally and with partners, including the voluntary sector. This is potentially complementary to the work being carried out to develop an Advice and Information Strategy with the voluntary and community sector, on which consultation is planned over the summer.

### **Financial Implications**

Due to the homeless activity and B&B costs outlined in the appendix, the over-spend on the B&B budget for 2015/6 was £1.7m, of which £1m was met by a one off use of reserves.

Due to the B&B growth in 2015/6 there is an immediate pressure at the start of 2016-7 as the number of families in B&B is significantly higher than was assumed when the budget was originally set. This, combined with the continuing homelessness pressures, the prospect of further welfare reform, a need to decant residents for the Grange Farm regeneration scheme and low supply of new affordable housing, mean it is likely that B&B numbers will rise at least as fast as last year. At current average B&B costs this indicates a potential pressure of £3.5 - £4.5m in 2016-7.

### **Performance Issues**

Performance is covered in the appendix.

### **Environmental Impact**

There are no specific environmental implications arising from this report.

### **Risk Management Implications**

Risk included on Directorate risk register? Yes

Separate risk register in place? No

The risk is to the Council's budgetary position.

### **Equalities implications**

Was an Equality Impact Assessment carried out? No (

If no, state why an EqlA was not carried out below:

This report is a position statement.

## Council Priorities

The homelessness situation, and measures to manage it, impact on the corporate priorities of:

- Build a Better Harrow – we are trying to improve the existing housing stock and develop new affordable housing
- Be more business-like and business friendly – our work with private landlords, potential tenants and developers will help to improve the local economy
- Protect the most vulnerable and support families – homelessness prevention work, advice and options aims to support (potentially) homeless families so that they can continue with their lives.

## Section 3 - Statutory Officer Clearance

Name: Dave Roberts	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	on behalf of the* Chief Financial Officer
Date: 26/5/16		

<b>Ward Councillors notified:</b>	<b>NO</b>
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## Section 4 - Contact Details and Background Papers

**Contact:** Jane Fernley, Head of Business Development and Transformation, tel. 020 8424 1283

### Background Papers:

Appendix 1 - Managing Homelessness Demand

Appendix 1a – Comparative Homelessness Activity Data