

**WAVERLEY BOROUGH COUNCIL**  
**HOUSING OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY COMMITTEE**

**27 NOVEMBER 2018**

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**Title:**

**Homelessness Reduction Act 2017 - update report**

[Portfolio Holder: Cllr Carole King]

[Wards Affected: All]

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**Summary and purpose:**

To update the Housing O&S Committee regarding the implementation of the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017 (HRA 2017) in Waverley from 3 April 2018

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**How this report relates to the Council's Corporate Priorities:**

**Equality and Diversity Implications**

Homelessness can have a devastating impact on health and welling and life chances for those affected by it. By providing services to prevent and relieve homelessness and to give support those affected by it, the work of the Housing Options Team supports Waverley's commitment to ensuring that those that live and work in Waverley have equal life chances.

**Financial Implications:**

When similar changes to the homelessness legislation in Wales were introduced, Welsh Councils experienced additional costs from an increased number of customers and an increase in administrative burdens in managing each case. Waverley currently benefits from new burdens and flexible homelessness funding from the Government but this is only guaranteed until April 2020.

**Legal Implications:**

The Homelessness Reduction Act 2017 introduced significant changes to the statutory framework regarding homelessness.

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**Background**

1. In a report to the Housing O&S Committee in November 2017 Officers outlined the main changes introduced by the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017 (HRA 2017). These included:
  - a) Extending the time when a household can be considered to be threatened with homelessness from 28 days to 56 days.
  - b) A requirement for Councils to work with households for 56 days to try to prevent their homelessness. This duty is owed to all household types, irrespective of local

connection to Waverley or whether the householder's actions have contributed to their threatened homelessness.

- c) If homelessness cannot be prevented, a duty to work with the households for a further 56 days to try to 'relieve' their homelessness.
- d) Local authorities are required to notify applicants as to what duty is owed to them at different stages of the 'prevention' and 'relief' processes. Additionally, they must provide written personalised action plans, outlining the tailored support that will be given, as well as what is expected of applicants.
- e) Applicants have numerous statutory rights of review of the various decisions made by Councils during the 'prevention' and 'relief' processes.
- f) In order to monitor the impact and effectiveness of the new duties, the Government have made radical changes to the data reporting requirements expected from Councils.
- g) From October 2018 public bodies such as hospitals, probation services, prisons, job centres, social services etc., have a 'Duty to Refer' homeless households to local authorities.

### **Waverley's preparations**

- 2. In preparation for the introduction of the legislation in April 2018, Officers undertook the following:
  - a) Procurement of a new database that would enable the capture of the large amount of household information required in Government's quarterly homelessness returns.
  - b) Piloting the use of the new database prior to April 2018 and training of staff and partners in its use.
  - c) Hosting a homelessness forum for statutory and voluntary partners in October 2017 that included discussions about the new legislation.
  - d) Updating procedures and website information and carrying out extensive training of staff and partners on the new duties.
  - e) Setting up of a online referral portal for public bodies to refer cases under the 'Duty to Refer' requirements
  - f) Commissioning of unfunded supported housing bed-spaces within and outside of Waverley. This not only benefits the clients and Waverley but also helps maintain the viability of already scarce supported housing schemes.
  - g) Entering a partnership with Woking Borough Council and Ethical Lettings to secure private rented shared houses for single applicants.
  - h) Developed its partnership with Ethical Lettings, a community interest letting agent, in order to secure affordable private rented properties for benefit dependent households. This has included a local radio advertising campaign to attract private rented landlords
  - i) Successfully secured a grant from Surrey County Council to employ a full-time support worker to join Waverley's existing support team within Housing Options until April 2020.

### **Waverley update**

- 3. Thankfully the feared rise in homelessness approaches following the HRA 2017 launch has so far not materialised in Waverley. However, the launch of the 'Duty to Refer' in October 2018 could result in increased presentations.
- 4. The predicted increase in the administrative burden for each case has materialised. As a result we have used Government funding to pay for an additional part-time Housing Options Co-ordinator role until April 2020.

5. The Council has also taken the opportunity arising from a Housing Options Officer moving to a Housing Options Support Officer role, to create a Senior Housing Options Officer role to provide enhanced resilience and expertise in the team.
6. Despite the increased work load per case, the Council has so far continued to keep the number of households placed in temporary accommodation to a minimum, as shown by the following tables:

**Homeless households in temporary accommodation as at 31 March**

<b>2011</b>	<b>2012</b>	<b>2013</b>	<b>2014</b>	<b>2015</b>	<b>2016</b>	<b>2017</b>	<b>2018</b>
2	2	1	4	5	1	1	0

**Homeless households in temporary accommodation 2018**

<b>31 Mar 2018</b>	<b>30 Jun 2018</b>	<b>30 Sept 2018</b>
0	1	0

7. Whilst the new database has been very helpful in capturing household information for the Government returns, officers are still liaising with the IT provider to iron out reporting issues.
8. On 9 October 2018 Waverley hosted another successful homelessness forum with the theme of partnership working. The forum included training on the new 'Duty to Refer' aspect of the legislation.
9. The forum was attended by 48 delegates from statutory and voluntary agencies including representatives from social services, health services, Citizens Advice Waverley, supported housing providers, Department of Work and Pensions, probation, faith groups, Ethical Lettings, Mears, Guildford Borough Council, housing associations as well as Waverley housing staff and the housing portfolio holder.

**Conclusion**

10. Preparation for the introduction of the HRA 2017 has been a massive task. Thankfully, due to the hard work of all concerned, the transition to the new way of working has been successfully managed.
11. The Council's ability to adjust to the new burdens of the HRA 2017 has been significantly helped through the use of the Government's new burdens funding and flexible homelessness grant e.g. the funding of initiatives such as the purchase of additional bed spaces in supported housing schemes.

12. The additional government homelessness funding for Waverley is outlined below:

	<b>17-18</b>	<b>18-19</b>	<b>19-20</b>
<b>New Burdens Funding</b>	£22,396	£20,514	£21,685
<b>Flexible Homelessness Grant</b>	£131,383.19	£151,169.13	£479,923
<b>Total</b>	<b>£153,779.19</b>	<b>£171,683.13</b>	<b>£501,608</b>

13. Officers have also had to use these additional Government funds to cover the overspend on its homelessness budget in 2017-2018 and we will also have to do this for 2018-19. This is due to the fact that increasingly Waverley has to fund 6 months rent in advance to enable benefit dependent homeless households to secure affordable private rented properties. Whilst households are obliged to pay back this money, given their financial circumstances and complex needs, this can often take a very long time and the reality is that a proportion of the debts will end up being unrecoverable.
14. Without the additional Government funds outlined above, the Council's ability to maintain its success in homelessness prevention would be severely challenged and this would also have a significant impact on the General Fund. To add some context, the cost of funding the 14 additional supported housing bed-spaces alone costs £115,502 a year.
15. Whilst Waverley will receive Government new burdens funding and flexible homelessness grant in 2019-2020, there is no clarity as to whether this funding will continue. The Government's presumption appears to be that as most Councils will reap the benefits of savings in temporary accommodation costs as a result of a homeless prevention approach under HRA 2017, there will be no need to provide additional funding. However, as Waverley has adopted a prevention approach for a number of years and, as a result, not had many households in expensive emergency accommodation, there are no savings to be had from reduced use of temporary accommodation.
16. Officers will therefore carefully manage the Government grant so as much of it as possible can be carried over into future years to protect the General Fund from increased expenditure for as long as possible.
17. Unrelated to the HRA 2017, but still worth noting given the potential impact on homelessness, the gradual roll out of Universal Credit from October 2018 is also likely to have an impact on benefit dependent households' ability to retain their accommodation.

## **Recommendation**

The Housing Overview & Scrutiny Committee is asked to note the content of this update report and agree any comments it wishes to pass to the Executive.

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### Background Papers

There are no background papers (as defined by Section 100D(5) of the Local Government Act 1972) relating to this report.

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