

## **Overview and Scrutiny Committee 19 January 2023 Advance Questions**

### **Agenda Item 4 – People Portfolio Holder Briefing**

#### **Question 1 (Page 23)**

Please can you also provide the figures for the last three years for the average number of households in emergency accommodation and the average numbers in temporary accommodation so it is possible to see how the overall amount of homelessness in the borough has changed over this period. What are the current numbers of rough sleepers in the borough and how are they being catered for?

#### **Written Answer**

The average number of households for current year and previous 2 years is on the slide, the number for 19/20 is 19, considerably less than current or previous 2 years. The number of homeless applicants in temporary accommodation remains at around 120 each year as we have access to a fixed number of TA properties. In November's rough sleeper count, 3 were recorded, currently the service is aware of 1. All rough sleepers are being accommodated in emergency accommodation under the Severe Weather Emergency Protocol (SWEP). One rough sleeper refuses all offers of help and assistance.

#### **Question 2 (Page 25)**

- (a) Can you give a breakdown of the 1213 households on the housing register in terms of the overall number of adults and children represented by these figures?
- (b) How many care leavers and what is the current priority given to care leavers?
- (c) We are asked to note how many applications are rejected but still have to be assessed. Please provide a breakdown as to the reason that applications are being rejected.
- (d) What is the breakdown of the housing need and how will these people get housing in other ways?
- (e) How much officer time does this take on average - how quickly does it become clear when an application does not fit the criteria?

#### **Written Answer**

- (a) The best breakdown that can be provided is 423 of these were adult only households and 790 households contained at least 1 child.
- (b) There are currently 35 care leavers on the Register and they attract Band B priority (regardless of their tenure).
- (c) About 50% of new applications are assessed, the other 50% do not have required documents so are not assessed. Of those that are assessed but still rejected the following reasons may apply: No local connection (largest reason for refusal), no housing need, rent/council tax arrears, income/savings above threshold, ASB/unacceptable behaviour, not eligible, homeowner/exercised Right to Buy/disposed of an asset within last 5-year, fraudulent application.

- (d) The breakdown of need is attached, applicants are also provided with tailored basic advice but if facing homelessness they will receive a detailed Personal Housing Plan should they make a homeless application.
- (e) A thorough assessment takes between 30mins-1hour. Our software package does give an indication of likely eligibility but this is only based on the questions applicants answer when completing the 1<sup>st</sup> part of the application form. It does not factor in the whole policy/exceptions/discretion etc.

### **Question 3 (Page 26)**

- (a) What have been the outcomes of the search for schemes with the Residential Providers to provide social rents?
- (b) Is it possible to confirm the level of social rent as this notes 60% but it was understood to be 50% of market rent in an area.

### **Written Answer**

- (a) We continue to work with registered providers to support schemes which deliver rented housing. Given the high building costs facing the industry, it is extremely difficult to achieve social rents on new build schemes either on s106 sites or 100% affordable housing schemes. Homes England is supportive of 100% affordable schemes delivering social rent tenures, but in our experience the grant requirement to deliver this tenure in more recent times is usually above the level Homes England can commit. However, there have been some successes. New schemes which will deliver social rent include Raven's redevelopment of the former Chavescroft site in Preston, which is only viable with a significant financial contribution from the Council to achieve social rents. Mitchell Court in Redhill being built by Transform Housing & Support will deliver social rent and relies on Homes England and RBBC capital funding to deliver. Whilst on the s106 site Land at Laburnum, Horley the affordable rent homes these will be set well below typical affordable rent levels. Typically, s106 sites particularly smaller sites, deliver affordable rent tenure due to a range of factors including costs.
- (b) The percentage difference varies by location and property size and is a guide only. Social rents are set according to a formula which takes into account a number of variables including wages and local average property prices at a specific point in time uplifted annually by a prescribed maximum percentage. The unregulated nature of market rents means they fluctuate, whereas social rents do not. Any increase in market rents widens the gap between social rent levels and market rents. Depending on location, size of property, and demand, social rents range from around 45% and 60% of market rents.

### **Question 4 (Page 27)**

- (a) What is the current number of homeless accommodations that have been made to those having been granted asylum in RBBC?
- (b) What average length of stay in hotels for these asylum seekers?
- (c) What home office funding is available to enable us to work with and support these households?

- (d) What other support is being provided by the council and what support is provided through the Council engaging with the voluntary, faith and community sector, including for English language training?
- (e) What was the outcome of the consultation about the house in Horley?

### **Written Answer**

- (a) Last year we had 11 homeless applications and so far this year there have been 13. All involved case work and a number will have been offered emergency accommodation (to confirm numbers offered accommodation would require each case to be read through – this was not possible for this short turn around).
- (b) The Home Office are responsible for asylum seekers accommodation and it seems they are often moved around the Home Office estate during the application process before being granted a decision on their asylum claim. Looking through a few cases they show that they have entered the UK and Home Office accommodation at various points during 2021.
- (c) We received £101,250 Asylum Dispersal Grant, to be used towards costs incurred in 2021/22 and 2022/23 by asylum seekers in hotels and QH. Support for these households is provided by a Home Office appointed contractor and as such there is no package of support required or provided by the council. The grant has typically been spent on housing costs following homeless applications and staff costs monitoring the use of these hotels and participating in partnership meetings related to the Asylum Seeker situation in the borough.
- (d) As above, support for the occupants is provided by a Home Office appointed contractor and as such there is no package of support required or provided by the council. Through officers in Community Partnerships, we continue to work with local partners – including those health and voluntary sectors – who are actively providing services and additional assistance as needed and identified, and with East Surrey College who are involved in providing some English language teaching.
- (e) The Home Office have included in in their pipeline of Over Flow Dispersal Accommodation units.

### **Question 5 (Page 31)**

Regarding the roll-out of energy support payments to those with alternative funding, have these households been offered early support from the money advice team, in the interim before their delay in receiving government support?

### **Written Answer**

This scheme is being led by central government, and will reply on applications being made directly to central government. At present, we can only estimate the number of households that may be eligible, although those that we have identified have been signposted to the Council's Household Support Fund to request vouchers to assist with the cost-of-living pressures.

### **Question 6 (Page 36)**

What are the outcomes to this money support scheme support? What is meant by the impact of Universal Credit? How many households supported have been found to not have sufficient finance unless they are able to secure more affordable housing, for example?

How many of these are then referred on to other agencies such as CDA or CAB, or are provided longer-term support if needed?

#### **Written Answer**

The Money Support Team works to help residents become more confident at budgeting to maximise their income and prevent increasing debt. The team support residents to manage their money with advice on benefits, budgeting, digital support, document organisation, getting a bank account, maximising income and money management.

The impact of Universal Credit relates to residents moving to this benefit, the delays that can exist when that transition happens and the difficulties around budgeting with less – or less frequent – payments.

The significant majority of the residents we support are – or are likely to be – struggling with the affordability of their housing, along with many other areas. Alongside our residents, we work with housing colleagues to avoid homelessness issues.

We are not a debt support organisation, so partnerships with CDA or CAB, along with others in this area continue to be critical. We only refer residents from money support to specialist debt services where their debt levels are severely impacting their ability to move forward.

### **Question 7 (Page 41)**

How does this compare to pre-covid levels of activity in the three leisure centres?

#### **Written Answer**

Membership numbers across the three centres are still just below the pre-pandemic levels and on track to recover in 2023. This is fully in line with the National picture across the sector.

Similarly, attendance numbers are slightly lower than they were in 2019 - 1 million in 2022, compared to 1.2 million in 2019.

### **Question 8 (Page 42)**

What was the attendance in 2022 for this full programme of activities ? We only have 2021 figures.

## Written Answer

There were 963 attendances at our 2022 activities (compared to 643 in 2019 and 472 in 2021).

In addition, there were 46 participants at Star for a Night, and 74 young people representing the borough at the Surrey Youth Games.

## Addendum – People Portfolio Holder Presentation for Community Partnerships

### Question 9 (Page 8)

- (a) What is the overall situation in terms of volunteer given, food shop donations, Fareshare support and paid purchases to provide the food and other items that are distributed? What was the impact of the loss of the Co-op in Redhill that used to donate food to the St Matthews foodbank?
- (b) Please provide details of the change in demand for energy top-ups and the extend of supply of energy saving gadgets across the borough.
- (c) Are any further cost-of-living events planned and if so for when and where?
- (d) What is the level of uptake so far for each pf the warm hubs declared across the borough?

## Written Answer

- (a) All foodbanks have reported a drop in donations although we are unable to comment on particular relationships individual foodbanks have with specific stores. Household Support Funding for foodbanks was delivered directly by SCC.

Our food clubs receive the bulk of their food from paid subscriptions to Fareshare (which are paid for by weekly membership fees from food club members). In addition, we used Household Support Funding (£10,000 in total across two rounds of the Household Support Fund) to top up stocks and (£15,000) for supermarket vouchers for club members. The food clubs received a small amount of food from individual donations and have relationships with local shops and supermarkets which provide varying amounts of produce (Redhill and Woodhatch estimate around 20% of their food comes from local supermarkets whereas Preston only receives around 5% of their food from these sources). We continue to explore potential donation sources (eg Olio a food sharing app) but are always conscious not to impact on existing relationships our foodbanks already have with potential suppliers.

- (b) We will be piloting a project with Epsom and Ewell Foodbank and Raven Housing Trust to provide eligible households with suitable energy saving devices through funding from the Household Support Fund and the UK Shared Prosperity Fund from January 2023. This project is in response to feedback from some partners that they were keen to look at more sustainable approaches to supporting people if fuel poverty. We will be able to report back on this pilot in Spring 2023. We are only able to work with organisations able to offer an energy use audit to ensure that any devices provided are of genuine use to applicant.

During our distribution of Household Support funds for energy top ups, we saw a great deal of interest from partners including CARB, Surrey Community Action, Victoria Alms Houses and Horley Lions. The full allocation of £25,000 for fuel poverty was distributed via partner organisations

- (c) We do not have any current plans to offer further cost-of-living events but continue to offer opportunities to get cost of living support to food club and foodbank members through regular visits from partner organisations.

Whilst we were pleased with the event held at Woodhatch, the amount of organisation and partner time in relation to the number of people who attended beyond those we are already in contact with, did not prove to be particularly good value.

Both Merstham and Woodhatch food clubs also offer a 'Circle of Support' model in partnership with Loveworks to enable residents to seek wider support and peer support and advice in relation to cost of living pressures.

- (d) Surrey County Council coordinate the warm hubs and collect data and we have been unable to get an update from them in time for Overview and Scrutiny.

The warm hubs on offer at our own Community Centres have seen no noticeable uptake above the usual expected footfall at the centres.

### **Question 10 (Page 9)**

This refers to the establishment of a resident-led participation group that provided feedback on grant applications. Please can you confirm how the group was selected, where it met/took place and what the feedback from the group was?

### **Written Answer**

Members of the East Surrey Place Communities and Prevention Board nominated a number of organisations, working across both Reigate & Banstead and Tandridge (The areas covered by East Surrey Place), to form a steering group to oversee the creation of a Participation Group.

The steering group included representatives from: Surrey Heartland NHS, Tandridge Voluntary Action, VARB, Tandridge Health & Wellbeing Board, Tandridge DC, First Community Health, Citizens Advice, Surrey Minority Ethnic Forum, R&B Community Development Workers and Community Centres.

The Steering group agreed the role description for members of the Participation Group and promoted the role amongst their networks.

Residents who expressed an interest in being a member of the group were invited to an informal discussion with one of the Partnerships Officers before taking part in an induction training event, where their role as influencers and not decision makers was explained. Not all residents who expressed an interest in being a member of the Participation Group became members of the group.

The Participation Group provided feedback on the 2 rounds of funding applications, via an online form. There were 17 members of the group in total.

The form made provision for the Participation Group members to offer an opinion of yes/ no / maybe fund and to provide a brief explanation for their opinion and where appropriate to offer insight into the issue / cause that was seeking funding.

The feedback from the Participation Group was made available to the Communities and Prevention Board to help inform their discussions and final decisions on grant awards.