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Membership of the Task Group

Councillors Nina Wood-Ford (Chair), Natalie Brookes, Anita Clayton, Pattie Hill and Antonia Pulsford.

Support Officer

Jess Bayley, Democratic Services Officer, Tel: (01527) 64252 Ext: 3268

Email: jess.bayley@bromsgroveandredditch.gov.uk

Completed

September 2017

Contact

Further copies of this report are available on request from:

Address: Overview and Scrutiny Team, Democratic Services, Redditch Town Hall, Walter Stranz Square, Redditch, B98 8AH

Email: scrutiny@redditchbc.gov.uk

FOREWORD

This review was a Short Sharp Review for Homeless people in Redditch. This had also come to light as rough sleeping in Redditch had become more visible locally.

There are many forms of homelessness; rough sleepers, sofa surfers, living in temporary accommodation, and people who, through no fault of their own, fall on hard times such as due to divorce, losing a job and problems within families and stepfamilies. Other causes can be alcohol and substance abuse and mental health problems.

While doing this review we were pleased to see how well Redditch Borough Council worked with the homeless and people who could potentially become homeless as well as with the outside organisations. We believe the young people of Redditch are well supported, though there is always more that can be done. However, there seems to be a gap for single people with no dependents aged over 35 years old who we really need to find better support for. I hope we have done this in our recommendations.

We have completed this review over July and August and have spoken to Council Departments, the Housing Portfolio Holder and independent organisations that help the homeless; St Basil's, Redditch Night Stop, the YMCA and the CAB. We also went to the Foodbank at St Stephen's Church in Redditch and the café held once a month in the Ecumenical Centre in Redditch run by Radiate Redditch.

I would like to thank those who gave up their time to speak to us for their feedback, knowledge and the information we received. I would also like to thank my co-workers on this review, Councillors Natalie Brooks, Anita Clayton, Pattie Hill, and Antonia Pulsford and of course Jess Bayley for her enthusiasm, hard work and writing; it never ceases to amaze us how quickly she can write, capture everything that is being said and produce all that paperwork and the final document.

We do not have all the answers or the funding to solve the housing problems in Redditch but we hope our recommendations are followed and that this will go some way in helping with those problems.



Councillor Nina Wood-Ford
Chair of the Homelessness Short Sharp Review

SUMMARY OF RECOMMENDATIONS

Recommendation 1

The draft Redditch Borough Council Housing Allocations Policy be adopted by the Council.

Financial Implications: There are no financial implications for the Council as this recommendation was made and approved in July 2017.

Legal implications: There are no legal implications.

Recommendation 2

Redditch Borough Council should take part in any opportunity to deliver Housing First in properties in the Borough. This should include applying to participate in any Housing First pilot schemes operated by the West Midlands Combined Authority (WMCA).

Financial Implications: The group is proposing that the Council should only participate in Housing First schemes where funding is available from an external source, including grant funding.

Legal implications: No legal implications have been identified.

Recommendation 3

Swanswell should be invited to attend a meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee to deliver a presentation outlining the services they provide to residents in Redditch.

Financial Implications: The costs of Officer time involved in arranging for a representative of Swanswell to attend a meeting of the Committee.

Legal implications: No legal implications have been identified.

Recommendation 4

The Leader of the Council should write to the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, the Rt. Hon. David Gauke MP, urging him to end the freeze on Local Housing Allowance (LHA) rates.

Financial Implications: The cost of time producing a letter.

Legal implications: No legal implications have been identified.

Recommendation 5

The Council's Communications and Arts and Events teams should notify the CAB of any forthcoming events in Redditch which they could attend to promote their services and heighten awareness of their services in the Borough.

Financial Implications: There would be the cost of Officer time notifying the CAB of events.

Legal implications: No legal implications have been identified.

INTRODUCTION/BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Introduction

In March 2017 the Overview and Scrutiny Committee received a proposal to undertake a scrutiny review of homelessness in the Borough. The review was suggested in a context in which the Council had launched a high profile campaign in the local community in respect of homelessness and this had received mixed coverage within the local press. Due to the vulnerable position of people who are homeless or at risk of homelessness and the interest generated by the campaign in the local community the Overview and Scrutiny Committee concluded that the proposed review should be launched. The subject of homelessness was also considered to be appropriate for further investigation as it related to three of the Council's strategic purposes:

- Help me to find somewhere to live in my locality.
- Help me to live my life independently (including health and activity).
- Help me to be financially independent.

There was general consensus amongst members of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee that as homelessness had previously been the subject of a detailed scrutiny exercise the investigation should be undertaken as a short sharp review and would not be launched until after the local Council elections in May 2017. Following the announcement of the general election for June 2017 the launch date was further postponed until the end of that month.

The short sharp review group was tasked with addressing the following during the course of the review:

- To review relevant Council policies and practices in respect of people experiencing or at risk of becoming homeless.
- To establish the current levels of homelessness in Redditch.
- To clarify the potential causes of homelessness.
- To analyse the potential impact of homelessness on a person's physical and mental health.
- To assess the existing support available to people who are homeless or at risk of becoming homeless.
- To scrutinise the potential impact of the new Homelessness Reduction Bill on homelessness levels.
- To review the findings of any scrutiny Task Groups that have investigated homelessness in other parts of the country and to identify any actions arising from these reports which could be replicated in Redditch.
- To investigate any opportunities for organisations to work in partnership to support to people who are homeless or at risk of becoming homeless.
- To identify any additional action that the Council could take to address homelessness in the Borough.

During the review the group gathered evidence from a range of sources. Interviews were held with Council Officers in the Housing Options team, Private Sector Housing and Customer Access and Financial Support teams. The Council's Portfolio Holder for Housing, Councillor Mark Shurmer, attended a meeting of the group in July and provided useful evidence that helped to inform the group's findings. Representatives of external organisations also kindly provided evidence for the group's consideration during interviews. This included representatives from St Basils, Redditch Night Stop, the

YMCA, the CAB – Bromsgrove and Redditch, Radiate Redditch and the St Stephen's Church Food Bank.

Written documentation was similarly considered during the review. This included written evidence from the Council's planning department in relation to local planning policies and affordable housing. The group assessed the content of relevant publications produced by the Local Government Association (LGA) and Shelter. In particular, the group valued the contents of Shelter's briefing paper *Homelessness Reduction Bill: Second Reading (House of Commons) (2017)* and the LGA's *Housing our Homeless Households: A Summary Document (June 2017)*. Consideration was also given to the Centre for Social Justice's (CSJ's) findings in its *Housing First: Housing-led Solutions to Rough Sleeping and Homelessness* report (March 2017). In addition, Members reflected back on the findings of the Council's previous Homelessness Prevention Review, which was conducted by the former Social Overview and Scrutiny Committee in 2006, as well as more recent findings detailed in the Preventing Homelessness in Bromsgrove Task Group's final report, completed by Bromsgrove District Councillors in 2016.

National Context

The review occurred at a time when nationally homelessness has become an increasingly topical issue. The CSJ has reported that rough sleeping has increased by over 130 per cent since 2010 with 4,000 people sleeping rough in England on any given night. Meanwhile the LGA estimated in *Housing our Homeless Households* that by 2017 there were 77,240 households in temporary accommodation in the country, including 120,540 children. The LGA also estimated that local and national government now spend £2 million a day on temporary accommodation, with net Council expenditure on temporary accommodation almost tripling from £50 million in 2009/10 to £146 million in 2015/16.

People can experience homelessness in different ways:

- Rough sleepers are the most visible form of homeless people.
- People can report to a Council when they have been given notice by their landlord that they will shortly be asked to leave a property. These people are at risk of becoming homeless.
- Some people will seek the support of a Council once their access to housing has reached crisis point. They may be housed in temporary accommodation, such as a hostel or bed and breakfast, whilst a long-term solution is sought to address their housing needs.
- The hidden homeless, are people living in overcrowded or unstable conditions, including 'sofa surfers', who access temporary accommodation provided by friends and family.

Local Picture:

The Social Overview and Scrutiny Committee's review of homelessness prevention in 2006 had a significant impact on the way in which housing services are provided to residents in the Borough. Members found that the 2006 review had its greatest impact in terms of bringing forward proposals which encouraged the Council to focus on preventing homelessness. During an interview with Officers from the Housing Options team Members were advised that the "...focus on preventing homelessness remains at the heart of delivering homeless services within the Borough. Since 2008 the structure within the Housing Options Team has developed to ensure officers have the skills,

knowledge and tools to enable them to prevent homelessness for all households regardless of whether they have a defined priority need within the provisions of homelessness legislation.”

Members were advised at a meeting on 4th July 2017 that since January 2008 a total of 2,170 homeless preventions had been recorded in Redditch, of which 711 were not priority need and 1,459 were in priority need. By comparison there had been 746 homelessness acceptances in Redditch in the same period. Members were provided with a breakdown of the homelessness acceptances in Redditch between 2011 and 2016 compared to those figures reported for other parts of Worcestershire:

	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016
Bromsgrove	70	77	75	58	85	
Malvern Hills	55	43	50	53	42	
Redditch	37	68	95	84	142	105
Worcester	203	202	201	176	144	
Wychavon	168	186	145	169	114	
Wyre Forest	126	162	152	114	165	

(The figures for the other local authority areas in 2016 were not available at the time of writing).

There are a number of schemes, both in the Borough and across the county, that are designed to enhance homelessness prevention. Some of these are delivered by Redditch Borough Council; other projects involve partnership working and / or service provision by external organisations. This includes the following initiatives:

- The Mortgage Rescue Scheme.
- The Money Advice Framework.
- Redditch Night Stop providing outreach support, mediation services and hosting families.
- The crash pad at St Basils, providing emergency accommodation to young people.
- The Worcestershire Strategic Housing Partnership Officer.
- The Young Persons Pathway Worker.
- The Move On Scheme.

Redditch Borough Council is the only local authority in Worcestershire to retain its Council housing stock. The Council currently has approximately 6,000 tenancies in a range of properties. Approximately 70 properties per annum are sold under right to buy rules to tenants in the Borough which impacts on the overall number of properties available in the Council’s housing stock. To help address this the Executive Committee approved the Housing Growth Programme in January 2017 which is designed to increase new house building and to enable other measures that can be taken to replenish the housing stock, including buying back former Council houses, purchasing properties from developers using Section 106 funding and purchasing stock from other housing providers.

Members have been advised that within the current Council housing stock there are 20 properties available to use for temporary accommodation for those who are homeless or at risk of becoming homeless. This includes a mix of bedsits, one and two bedroom properties. On average residents stay in temporary accommodation for 31 days before

permanent housing can be obtained. There is also one dispersal unit which can accommodate two single people who have their own rooms but share communal facilities. The Council is shortly due to start working with Spring Housing to provide a three bedroom house under a licence agreement that will deliver supported housing to up to three single people.

Redditch Borough Council's planning policies require that developments consisting of 11 dwellings or more are expected to provide 30 per cent of their units for affordable housing on the site. Where the development will consist of less than 11 dwellings, and the combined total floor space exceeds 1000 sqm, a commuted sum can be sought which can be used to purchase additional affordable housing stock. Since the start of the period covered by the Borough of Redditch Local Plan No 4, from 1st April 2011, 383 affordable units have been provided in the Borough, equating to 37.6 per cent of all completions. The definitions for different types of affordable housing that apply in the Council's planning policies can be viewed at Appendix 4 to this report.

Bromsgrove review

During the course of the review Members scrutinised the findings detailed in a report produced by Bromsgrove District Council's Preventing Homelessness in Bromsgrove Task Group (September 2016). The choice had been made to consider the content of this document due to the recent completion of the exercise and to the fact that the local authority shares many services with Redditch Borough Council and there might be opportunities available to work together to address homelessness. Members were impressed by the content of the Bromsgrove scrutiny group's report, particularly in relation to recent welfare changes.

A key proposal in the Bromsgrove report called for Bromsgrove District Council to investigate the potential to introduce a local authority lettings scheme. Local authority lettings agencies have been established by Councils in other parts of the country, such as Worcester City Council's City Life Lettings and Birmingham City Council's Let to Birmingham scheme. The model used for these schemes varies but they can provide assurances to landlords that rent will be paid on a monthly basis for the duration of the tenancy and that tenancy will be managed for a competitive fee by the Council. The group briefly considered the possibility of a similar scheme being introduced in Redditch. However, Members concluded that such a scheme would not be suitable for Redditch because the housing market in the Borough is different to that in Bromsgrove and the demographics of the two districts differ, with residents having different needs. Members also had concerns that a local authority lettings scheme might struggle to attract private sector landlords to participate in the scheme due to the competitive nature of the local private rented sector market in the Borough.

Homelessness campaign

During the course of the review Members scrutinised the approach that had been adopted by the Council to a campaign in respect of homelessness, which took place in March 2017. The campaign had been launched in a context in which a number of people had been sleeping rough in Redditch town centre. The aim of the campaign had been to highlight the work that the local authority was already undertaking to support homeless people and constructive action that could be taken by concerned residents to help those who are homeless. Unfortunately initial press coverage of this campaign had been quite critical of the local authority. Work was undertaken by Officers to provide

context and to clarify the purposes of the campaign and more positive feedback was received by the Council on social media by the end of the month.

A major misconception that arose in the initial reaction to the campaign was the perception that the Council was not helping those who were sleeping rough and was encouraging residents to also avoid providing help. Members have learned during the course of the review that in fact all of those sleeping rough had either been offered emergency accommodation by the Council which they had not chosen to take up or in some cases already had access to accommodation which they were not choosing to use. The group agrees that this should be highlighted in this report.

Members have been advised that Officers are aiming to relaunch the campaign later in the year in order to help raise awareness of constructive ways in which people can help those who are homeless or at risk of becoming homeless. The group are in agreement that this campaign should be undertaken and they are fully supportive of the efforts that are being made by Officers to address this.

CHAPTER 1: HOUSING POLICY AND LEGISLATION

Recommendation 1	The draft Redditch Borough Council Housing Allocations Policy be adopted by the Council.
Financial Implications	There are no financial implications for the Council as this recommendation was made and approved in July 2017.
Legal Implications	There are no legal implications.

Housing Allocations Policy

At a meeting of the group on 4th July 2017 Members pre-scrutinised a draft copy of the Council's new Housing Allocations Policy. Prior to this date the policy had last been updated in 2012 and as there had been a number of legislative changes in the following five year period Officers had concluded that the policy needed to be reviewed. The review took into account both the legislative changes and the lessons that had been learned by officers when applying systems thinking principles to various trials in Housing Services during that period.

A number of changes were made to the policy which Members concurred would enhance its effectiveness including the following:

- The policy had been updated to reflect the Council's current approach to delivering services in line with the local authority's strategic purposes.
- The updated policy provided greater clarity in respect of different housing bands within the Council's Choice Based Lettings system. Members agreed that this would help residents to better understand the process.
- Further clarification was also provided in the policy in relation to the points system which informs Choice Based lettings, which again Members agreed would help residents to understand the system.
- The changes to the policy mean that applicants in the Gold Band will only receive one offer of accommodation from the Council. In the past applicants could receive up to two offers which could elongate the process and make it more difficult to plan housing placements for other residents on the Council's housing list.
- The updates included the incorporation of Direct Matching into Council policy. This involves Officers discussing the resident's needs with them and then directly matching that person to a suitable property in an appropriate neighborhood. Members were advised that this approach, during a trial undertaken by the Council, had resulted in an 80 per cent reduction in the number of residents refusing the properties that they had been offered by the local authority.

The group was impressed by the proposed changes and therefore recommended that the updated policy should be adopted by the Council. The group's recommendation was endorsed by the Overview and Scrutiny Committee at a meeting on 4th July and subsequently received the support of the Executive Committee on 11th July. The Council subsequently formally adopted this updated version of the Housing Allocations Policy on 24th July 2017. As such this recommendation has already been approved and no further decision is required on the recommendation at this stage, though information

has been included in this report about the proposal to ensure that a complete record of the group's activities is provided.

Current Legal Context

As the local housing authority Redditch Borough Council has a duty, under the Housing (Homeless Persons) Act 1977 to secure permanent accommodation for people who are unintentionally homeless and considered to be in priority need. Some of these duties were subsequently amended in the Housing Act 1996. In the latter piece of legislation a person is considered to be homeless if they have no access to accommodation which it would be reasonable for them to continue to occupy, if they cannot gain access to their property or if it is a moveable structure and they have nowhere to place it. Currently a person is considered to be threatened with homelessness if they are likely to become homeless within the next 28 days.

There are a number of categories of priority need for housing, as detailed in Section 189 of the Housing Act 1996 and the Homelessness (Priority Need for Accommodation) (England) Order 2002:

- A pregnant woman or a person who resides with a pregnant woman or might reasonably be expected to reside with a pregnant woman.
- A person with whom dependent children reside or might reasonably be expected to reside.
- A person aged 16 or 17 who is not a relevant child for the purposes of Section 23 (a) of the Children Act 1979.
- A person, other than a relevant student, who is aged under 21 but over 16 and whilst still under 18 was, but is no longer, looked after, accommodated or fostered.
- A person who is vulnerable as a result of old age, mental illness, physical disability or other special reason.
- A person who has reached the age of 21 who is vulnerable as a result of being looked after, accommodated or fostered. (Not including a relevant student.)
- A person who is vulnerable as a result of having been a member of Her Majesty's regular naval or military air forces.
- A person who is vulnerable as a result of serving a custodial sentence, having being convicted for contempt of court or having been remanded in custody.
- A person who is homeless or threatened with homelessness as a result of an emergency such as a flood or a fire.
- A person who is vulnerable for any other special reason or anyone who lives with them.

(This list has been reproduced from the Preventing Homelessness in Bromsgrove Task Group's final report, September 2017).

Sections 191(1) and 196(1) of The Housing Act 1996 provide legal definitions of those who are considered to be homeless intentionally or threatened with homelessness intentionally. These are that:

- the person deliberately does or fails to do anything in consequence of which the person ceases to occupy accommodation (or the likely result of which is that the person will be forced to leave accommodation);
- the accommodation is available for the person's occupation; and
- it would have been reasonable for the person to continue to occupy the accommodation.

Local authorities cannot assume that a person is intentionally homeless. Instead the local housing authority must be satisfied of the intentionality in accordance with the legislation.

Homelessness Reduction Act 2017

During the course of the review Members investigated the Homelessness Reduction Bill, in line with one of the key objectives for the exercise. Members learned that this bill received royal assent in April 2017, becoming the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017. At the time of writing no date had been set for the legislation to come into force, though Members have been advised that this is likely to occur in 2018.

Formal guidance for local authorities in relation to the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017 had not been published at the time of writing. However, various organisations, including Shelter, have reviewed the legislation and highlighted a number of new duties and requirements in this legislation which have implications for local housing authorities, including Redditch Borough Council. This includes the following:

- Extending the period in which an applicant is considered to be threatened with homelessness. The Council will be required to accept an applicant as being threatened with homelessness if this might occur in the next 56 days, rather than the 28 days that apply at present.
- There will be a new duty for Councils to assess the applicant's claim if they are homeless or threatened with homelessness and to agree with the applicant a personalised plan.
- A new prevention duty will be placed on local authorities to ensure that suitable accommodation does not cease to be available to eligible applicants threatened with homelessness. This duty applies regardless of whether the individual is considered to be in priority housing need.
- A new relief duty will be placed on local authorities to help applicants secure accommodation, in cases where the Council believes the individual is homeless and eligible for assistance. This duty applies regardless of whether the individual is considered to be in priority need or may be intentionally homeless.
- According to Shelter Councils can provide notice to applicants considered to have "...deliberately and unreasonably refused to cooperate with the above duties or to take any step set out in the personalised plan (clause 7)."
- For applicants in priority need Councils will now have a duty to find a suitable tenancy lasting six months rather than the 12 month minimum tenancy that is currently required.
- Other agencies will have a duty to notify Councils in cases where they become aware of people who are at risk of becoming homeless. This duty will apply both to public sector organisations and to organisations in the Voluntary and Community Sector (VCS).

The key emphasis in the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017 is on local authorities and other partners taking more action to prevent homelessness from occurring in the first place. The group has concluded that, based on the action that has already been taken by the local authority to focus on homelessness prevention, Redditch Borough Council should be well placed to respond to these new legislative requirements. However, Members have been advised that the new legislative requirements could be quite bureaucratic and may have significant resource implications for local authorities. This concern appears to be shared by Shelter which has commented on the potential

resource implications for local authorities, particularly for those Councils facing significant demand for support addressing homelessness:

“...we consider it inevitable that, to be able to help people under the new duties, councils with significant levels of existing homelessness will require additional resources and, more importantly, an adequate supply of accessible, affordable and suitable homes in the social or private rented sectors.” (Shelter, 2017).

The group would suggest that the impact of the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017 on the work of the Council's housing teams should be monitored so that any challenges in relation to resources will be identified at an early stage and can be addressed if necessary.

CHAPTER 2: HOUSING AND SUPPORT WITHIN THE COMMUNITY

Recommendation 2	Redditch Borough Council should take part in any opportunity to deliver Housing First in properties in the Borough. This should include applying to participate in any Housing First pilot schemes operated by the West Midlands Combined Authority (WMCA).
Financial Implications	The group is proposing that the Council should only participate in Housing First schemes where funding is available from an external source, including grant funding.
Legal Implications	No legal implications have been identified.

Private Sector Housing

Rents in the Council's housing stock are the lowest in the Borough and Council tenancies offer the greatest security in terms of tenancy. However, the Council house supply cannot meet the total demand in the Borough for rented properties. People considered to be in a priority band for housing are therefore currently the most likely to secure a Council property, in line with the Council's Housing Allocations Policy. Whilst there are other registered social housing providers in the Borough it is estimated that they can only provide 1,600 tenancies. Inevitably this means that there is significant demand for private sector housing in the Borough amongst residents who cannot afford to purchase their own properties.

The group has been advised that there are approximately 4,000 private rented properties occupied in Redditch. Nationally renting has flourished in recent years as house buying has become more difficult for many households. Members have been advised that in Redditch occupancy in the private rented sector increased from 4.3 per cent in 2001 to 11.7 per cent in 2011 whilst home ownership declined by 5 per cent in the same period.

The majority of private sector landlords in Redditch own one or two properties. Members have been advised that the rents charged for local properties in the private rented sector have been increasing in recent years, with the level of rent affected by demand and supply, location and the quality of the property. Landlords do have significant responsibilities, particularly if they own Houses in Multiple Occupation (HMOs). In many cases landlords will also have mortgages and other expenses associated with their properties which they need to cover to ensure that their participation in the private rented sector remains a financially viable option. Often the Council will become involved in helping tenants living in the private rented sector where problems are reported by tenants in relation to the condition of a property, such as damp problems, which can lead to property inspections by Council staff. However, many other properties are maintained in good condition by both the landlords and tenants.

The group was advised during the course of the review that the duration of tenancies within the private rented sector in Redditch can vary. Members were interested to learn that of 58 cases between January and December 2014 where a tenancy in the private

rented sector had come to an end 22 were issued with a notice to leave within two years of moving into the property whilst 33 cases were issued with a notice to leave after they had been living in a private rented property for over two years. A significant number of such notices, 25 out of 58, were received by tenants living in former Council house properties. Residents who have been asked to leave in these circumstances often then turn to the Council for help securing suitable accommodation.

During the course of the review Members were advised by a number of expert witnesses in the VCS that increasingly private sector landlords are reluctant to accept tenants in receipt of housing benefits. The introduction of Universal Credit has led to changes in the way that housing benefits are provided to recipients; this benefit is now paid directly to the applicant, unless they can demonstrate that they are vulnerable in some way, whereas previously it was paid directly to the landlord. It should be noted that a similar problem was reported by Bromsgrove Members in their review of homelessness in 2016 indicating that this is not a problem that is confined to Redditch. In addition, the CSJ has reported, in their review of Housing First, that “...recent research found that 82 per cent of private landlords were unwilling to let to someone who was homeless.” (CSJ, 2017, p 24). As such people who are already homeless, though not necessarily considered to be in priority need for housing, may struggle to secure suitable accommodation in the private rented sector.

Demographics and Accommodation

During the course of the review Members interviewed representatives of a number of organisations that provide support and accommodation to young people who are homeless or at risk of becoming homeless. Members were really impressed by the services that are provided by St Basils, the YMCA and Redditch Night Stop. Young people might require housing support where there has been an irreversible family breakdown, where the young person has complex needs or in cases where the young person is leaving care. Members were advised that often young people did not have the life skills needed to manage a tenancy and their personal finances. St Basils and the YMCA both provide support to young people to enable them to develop these life skills. Increasingly all of these organisations have been providing support to young people with highly complex needs in a context in which the funding available to VCS organisations is squeezed. The group would like to thank these organisations for the excellent support services that they provide to young people who are homeless or at risk of homelessness.

One of the gaps in local service provision that was consistently raised with Members was the availability of appropriate accommodation to older adults with complex needs. Many of the VCS groups reported that adults not eligible to receive accommodation with St Basils, Redditch Night Stop or the YMCA could struggle to secure suitable accommodation if they were not considered to be in priority need for housing under existing housing legislation.

The CSJ reported in 2017 that for some people their complex needs can contribute to their homelessness, whilst for others their difficulties will emerge as a result of becoming homeless. Complex needs can include substance abuse issues, mental ill health, physical health problems, a history of offending and difficulties encountered whilst in care. In the most challenging cases people may have a range of problems. According to a review of homelessness by Homeless Link, reported by the CSJ, “...33 per cent of people using homeless accommodation projects have multiple or complex needs, 31 per cent have a drug problem, 23 per cent have a problem with alcohol, 6 per cent have a learning difficulty and 32 per cent have a mental health problem.” (CSJ, 2017, p 26).

People with these complex needs can struggle to access appropriate accommodation. Members were advised during the review that housing associations and landlords may be reluctant to provide accommodation to people with these needs. This appears to be a challenge nationally as the CSJ has noted that “...46 per cent of homelessness accommodation projects reported refusing a client access to services because their needs were too complex and 73 per cent said they had turned people away because their needs were too high.” (CSJ, 2017, p 32). Like other local authorities Redditch Borough Council can struggle to find accommodation for people in this position.

The Council does make referrals to hostels in both Birmingham and Worcester. These hostels can provide the more specialist support that may be needed by individuals struggling with drug and alcohol problems. Consideration had been given by the group to the potential for a hostel to be introduced in the Borough to house homeless people and those at risk of becoming homeless who have the most complex needs. Members had been advised by representatives of the VCS that some local residents with complex needs are reluctant to leave the Borough, which is often where their entire social and support networks are located, and therefore would prefer to sleep rough. However, a number of expert witnesses consulted by the group also expressed concerns that hostel accommodation is not always suitable for people with complex needs, particularly for those who may have experienced abuse at an earlier age who might not feel comfortable residing in shared accommodation. The group was also mindful of the fact that it could be difficult to identify a suitable property to convert for use as a hostel, which could require significant expenditure. Based on all of this evidence on balance the group concluded that it would not be appropriate to propose that a hostel be introduced in the Borough.

Housing First

Housing First was originally developed in New York in the 1990s to help those with chronic homelessness problems and mental ill health to access suitable accommodation. There are a number of key features underpinning Housing First:

- The most vulnerable people with complex needs, who are either homeless or at risk of becoming homeless, participate in Housing First.
- Flexible support is provided to the tenant for as long as they need it, which helps to reassure landlords participating in the scheme.
- Tenants are not required to have tackled any substance abuse problems before they enter their tenancies; this can be addressed over time whilst they are living in their accommodation by staff involved in the Housing First scheme.

Housing First has been piloted in other parts of Britain. To date these projects have reported positive outcomes. According to the CSJ's report the Fulfilling Lives Islington and Camden Housing First project had enabled 100 per cent of tenants with complex needs to sustain their tenancies whilst the Threshold Housing First project in Greater Manchester had achieved up to 80 per cent of sustained tenancies. (CSJ, 2017, pp 42 – 43).

Members learned during the review that the subject of Housing First was previously considered by the Mental Health Services for Young People Task Group in 2016/17. Towards the end of their review this earlier scrutiny group considered a report published by the West Midlands Combined Authority's (WMCA's) Mental Health Commission, entitled *Thrive West Midlands: An Action Plan to Drive Better Mental Health and Wellbeing in the West Midlands* (January 2017). This outlined suggested actions that

could be taken by local authorities, like Redditch Borough Council, that had signed up to the WMCA's Mental Health Concordat. Housing First was one of the suggested actions detailed in this plan. The Mental Health Services for Young People Task Group had concluded that Housing First could provide significant support to people experiencing mental ill health but further investigation of the potential implications for the Council was required. This proposal was approved by the Executive Committee in April 2017.

In line with standing practice the Overview and Scrutiny Committee subsequently received a monitoring update in respect of this proposal at a meeting of the Committee on 1st June 2017. As the meeting was taking place relatively soon after the Mental Health Services for Young People Task Group had concluded their investigations it would not have been realistic to expect significant progress by that stage. However, Officers did report that "... *With regard to Housing First the WMCA have commissioned external support to design their approach and they are considering Redditch as a prospective site for the proof of concept pilot.*" The Homelessness Short Sharp Review group would urge the Executive Committee to participate in this pilot should the opportunity to arise in order to assist those residents in Redditch with the most complex needs.

Redditch would be a good location in which to launch such a pilot scheme. The geographical boundaries of the Borough are relatively small which would help staff to arrange to meet regularly with clients without having to spend significant time travelling between appointments. Redditch is also unusual inasmuch as the Council retains its own housing stock, unlike the majority of local authorities in the country. A small number of these properties could be used as part of the pilot to help test the viability of Housing First in different contexts.

However, it should be noted that the group is suggesting that the Council should only participate in this pilot scheme if additional finances are made available to the Council to enable participation. There are costs associated with delivering Housing First schemes. The greatest costs are associated with funding the case workers who provide support to tenants housed through the scheme. According to a review of Housing First undertaken by the University of York "... *the lowest cost Housing First services were £26 an hour, the mid-range service £34 an hour and the most expensive service £40 an hour*" (CSJ, 2017, p 49). This review also found that on average case workers provided clients with three hours of support per week, equating to £5,304 per client per year (based on mid-range costs). The group recognises that in the current challenging economic circumstances for local government the Council does not have the financial resources to pay for this service. Financial support would therefore need to be provided by the WMCA, or another funding provider, to enable the Council to participate in this pilot.

Recommendation 3	Swanswell should be invited to attend a meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee to deliver a presentation outlining the services they provide to residents in Redditch.
Financial Implications	The costs of Officer time involved in arranging for a representative of Swanswell to attend a meeting of the Committee.
Legal Implications	No legal implications have been identified.

The group recognises that, due to potential financial barriers, it may not prove possible to deliver a Housing First scheme in Redditch and even if Housing First is introduced it is likely that only a small number of the most complex cases will receive support initially. As such the support services provided to people struggling to address alcohol or drug addiction remains crucial.

Members had been keen to investigate existing substance abuse programmes during the review. The group was therefore disappointed that they did not have an opportunity to arrange to interview representatives of Swanswell within the short time available for their investigations. Members have been advised that the Council's Housing Options and Locality teams do refer residents, including Council tenants, to Swanswell for support to address their addictions. Given the vulnerability of their clients, and the need for Members to be able to sign post residents to appropriate support services, the group believes that it would be helpful for Members to access further information about the services Swanswell delivers. Members are therefore proposing that representatives of Swanswell should be invited to attend a meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee in due course to deliver a presentation on the subject of the services the organisation provides. The Overview and Scrutiny Committee can make a decision in respect of this proposal as the Committee determines the content of the scrutiny work programme.

CHAPTER 3: WELFARE CHANGES AND FINANCIAL SUPPORT

Recommendation 4	The Leader of the Council should write to the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, the Rt. Hon. David Gauke MP, urging him to end the freeze on Local Housing Allowance (LHA) rates.
Financial Implications	The cost of time producing a letter.
Legal Implications	No legal implications have been identified.

Recent Welfare Changes

During the course of the review Members were keen to clarify the impact that recent welfare changes may have had on Redditch residents and their risks of becoming homeless. Officers were interviewed about recent welfare changes and were invited to provide information about the number of residents living in Redditch who had been affected by these changes. Members were impressed by the use of a table structure in Preventing Homelessness in Bromsgrove Task Group's final report and chose to emulate this style to present similar data for Redditch. (The details provided were accurate as of July 2017).

Type of Change	Implementation Stage	Impact Locally
<p>Benefit Cap – the cap applies to the total amount that people in a household can receive from a number of benefits combined. The level of the cap is: £500 per week for couples with or without children. £500 per week for single parents who have children living with them. £350 per week for single adults who do not have children living with them.</p>	<p>Already implemented. The cap reduced from £26,000 to £20,000 per annum outside London as of April 2016.</p>	<p>At the end of June 2017 there were 75 cases being capped. The Authority was informed to expect up to 199 families could be affected within the Redditch area.</p>
<p>Spare Room Subsidy –this is the calculation of housing benefit payments based on the number of people in the household and the size of the accommodation. The spare room subsidy applies to all working age tenants renting from a local authority, housing association or other registered social landlord. It brings housing benefits payable to tenants of social housing in line with private tenants. (Those with one spare bedroom lose 14% of their eligible rent and those with two or more spare bedrooms lose 25% of their eligible rent.)</p>	<p>Implemented from April 2013.</p>	<p>At the end of June 2017 there were 324 cases in Redditch affected by the Spare Room Subsidy. 263 cases affected by the 14% rate and 61 by the 25% rate.</p>

<p>Introduction of Local Council Tax Support Scheme – Council Tax benefits ended in March 2013 and local authorities were required to introduce a Council Tax Support Scheme.</p>	<p>Redditch Borough Council has a Council Tax Support scheme which allows for eligible residents to apply for up to 80 per cent support.</p>	<p>There have been 4,133 Working Age Council Tax Support Scheme cases. It is not now possible to know how many have been impacted by the changes.</p>
<p>Universal Credit – this currently applies to single job seekers with no child dependents making a new claim in Redditch.</p>	<p>This has already been implemented for single job seekers and is due to be rolled out to further categories of claimants in Redditch in due course.</p>	<p>As Universal Credit is provided by the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) the Council does not have access to this data. However, it can be confirmed that 135 customers in receipt of Housing Benefits from the Council are also in receipt of universal credit.</p>
<p>Temporary absences from Great Britain Rules for Housing Benefits – Residents who spend four or more weeks out of the country are unable to claim housing benefits.</p>	<p>This requirement was implemented in July 2016.</p>	<p>No measure of the impact is available, though Members have been advised that the authority is reliant on people reporting cases to the Council.</p>
<p>Removing entitlement for Housing Benefit payments to Young People aged 18-21 - Certain categories of young people will be exempt, including vulnerable young people, those who cannot return home to live with their parents, young people who are parents who have children who live with them and young people who have been in work for six months or more prior to making a claim.</p>	<p>The entitlement to the housing benefit element of Universal Credit is due to be withdrawn for this age group with effect from October 2017.</p>	<p>As Redditch was not due to become Fully Digital until October 2017 it was not possible to obtain figures in response to this at the time of writing.</p>
<p>Reduction in social rents – under the welfare reform and work bill 2015, all social rents were due to reduce by 1% for the 4 financial years in the period 2016/17 to 2019/20.</p>	<p>This was due to be implemented from April 2016 onwards.</p>	<p>Members have been advised that this has impacted on the Council's revenue from rents and has implications for the Housing Revenue Account (HRA).</p>
<p>Restrictions on housing benefits for the under 35s – Housing benefit claimants aged under 35 with no dependents living in the private rented sector are only eligible to claim housing benefits that cover the costs of a room in shared accommodation.</p>	<p>This rule has already been introduced for claimants in private rented accommodation. The restrictions have not yet come into force in respect of social housing tenants.</p>	<p>No figures could be provided for the number of residents affected by this restriction. However, Members have been advised that there are currently 72 licensable Houses in Multiple Occupation (HMOs) and 145 non-licensable HMOs in Redditch.</p>
<p>Cap of Housing Benefit in the social rented sector - new tenancies arranged as of 1st April 2016 will only receive rent capped at the Local Housing Allowance (LHA) rate.</p>	<p>This is due to take effect from 2018 but will apply to those whose tenancies took effect from April 2016 (or from 1st April 2017 if they are in supported housing).</p>	<p>No measure of the impact is available as yet.</p>

Financial Support

In Redditch some financial support is available to residents who are struggling to manage their finances and / or to cover housing costs. In the first place there is a Discretionary Housing Payment (DHP) budget which is provided to local authorities by the Government in an annual grant to help provide financial assistance to claimants in receipt of housing benefits who are struggling with their housing costs. In 2016/17 221 Redditch residents received financial support using funds from the DHP budget, with 2.3 per cent of residents making repeat requests for this support. In 2017/18 the Council's DHP budget is £153,589.

The local authority has a Council Tax Support Scheme. This scheme works on the premise that every resident will be capable of paying at least 20 per cent of their Council Tax. However, the Council also has a Hardship Fund Policy which is designed to protect vulnerable people who may be struggling to make Council Tax payments. The budget for this fund is relatively small, at £25,000 per annum. Awards made from the Hardship Fund are discretionary and customers do not have a statutory right to an award. The Council would expect people seeking help with Council Tax payments to work constructively with the authority to discuss their financial issues. Where residents do engage with the Council in this manner payments can be suspended until the individual's financial issues have been discussed and plans developed.

Officers have been working in a trial capacity in a Financial Inclusion Team (FIT) in recent months. This team can provide personal budgeting advice to individuals who are struggling with their finances. The workload and type of cases that the FIT team works on varies in complexity and number. The group concluded that the work of the FIT Officers was really important and they would be keen to see this approach to supporting residents continuing when the trial ends.

Residents experiencing financial difficulties can also apply for financial support from the Council's Essential Living Fund (ELF). The fund is relatively small, with a total annual budget of £30,000 per annum, and there is no statutory right for residents to receive assistance from the fund. The Council's Discretionary Essential Living Support Scheme requires that assistance provided to residents from this fund is distributed in the form of goods or vouchers and not as cash. Applications for assistance under this scheme have to be made in person and are contingent on the individual(s) meeting with Council Officers to discuss their financial difficulties further.

Local Housing Allowance (LHA)

Tenants living in properties in the private rented sector can receive financial assistance to help cover their rents. The LHA can be provided to those in receipt of benefits or on low incomes who are struggling to pay their rent. This financial assistance is provided in the form of the LHA, which is set by the Valuation Office and is based upon the 30th percentile of local rented accommodation, meaning that 70 per cent of local rents will always cost more than the LHA.

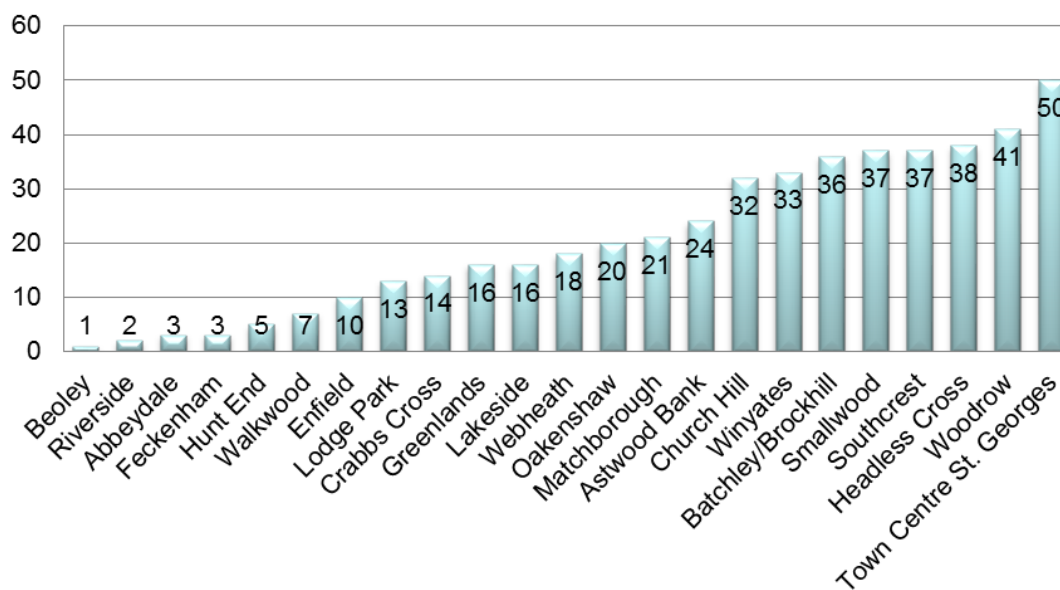
There is a maximum limit on the amount that can be claimed in the LHA for properties of different sizes. The table below sets out the levels that the LHA is currently set at:

Type of accommodation	Local Housing Allowance
Shared accommodation	£61.45
1 bed	£92.05
2 bed	£117.70
3 bed	£133.32
4 bed	£176.56

Members have been advised that in 2014 in Redditch there were 1,070 applicants from the private rented sector in receipt of the LHA, representing approximately 25 per cent of the sector. (Members were advised that 2014 was the latest period in which complete data covering this issue could be provided, though Officers interviewed by the group suggested that the numbers had probably risen since this date). In total 477 applicants received the full LHA though also had to top up their rent every month by other means. A total of 145 cases had to top up their rent by between 0 and £10, 143 cases had to top up their rent by between £10 and £20, 92 cases had to top up their rent by between £20 and £30, and 95 cases had to top up their rent by more than £30.

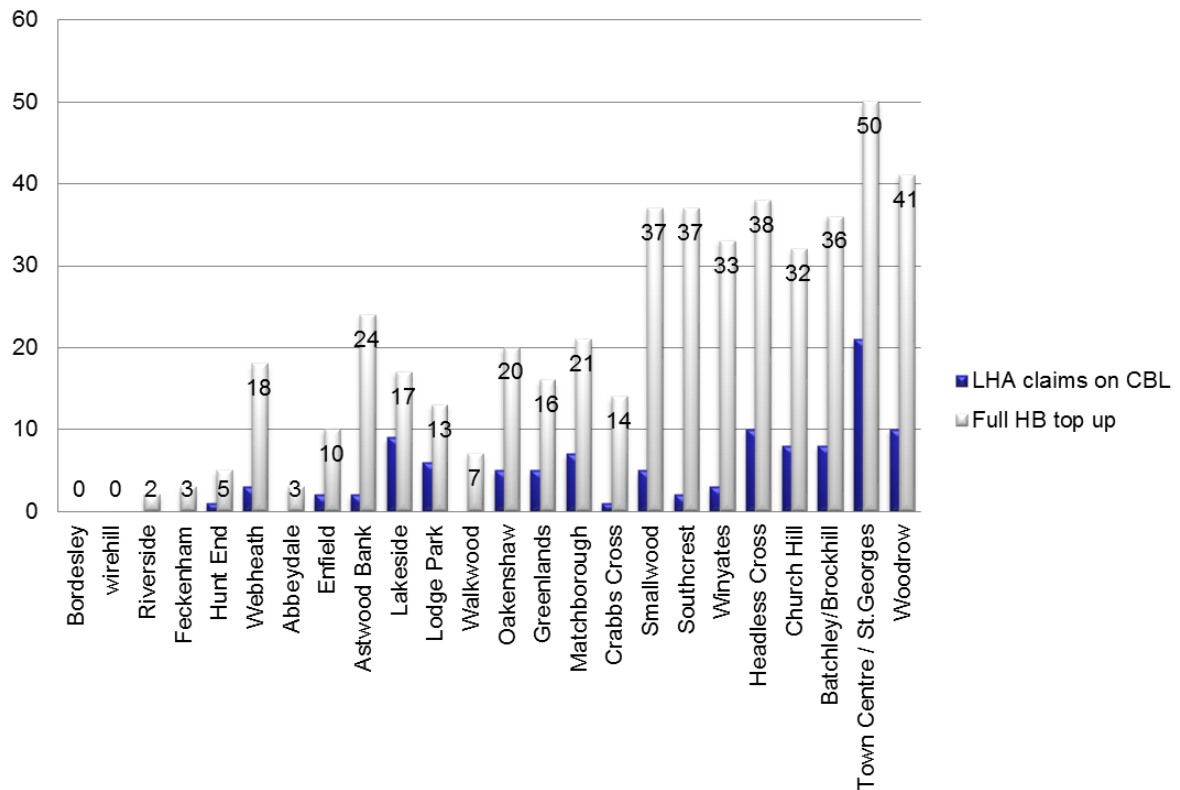
The group was advised that many of the households that were having to top up their rent were concentrated in particular areas of the Borough. A geographical breakdown can be observed in the table below (again the figures provided relate to circumstances as of 2014).

Full LHA cases top up area



The group had some concerns about the vulnerability of tenants in this position and about the potential for these people to be placed at risk of becoming homeless if they were to fall into rental arrears. Members were also concerned to learn that in many cases those in receipt of the LHA and who were having to top up their rent were not necessarily registered with the Council's Choice Based Lettings system, so might struggle to access suitable alternative accommodation in a timely manner should they find the need to leave their existing accommodation for financial reasons. The following

table highlights the numbers of applicants in receipt of LHA who top up their rent who are also registered with the Choice Based Lettings system.



Based on this data Members concluded that the LHA, as it currently operates, is not sufficient to support many vulnerable families and individuals at risk of becoming homeless who live in Redditch.

Concerns about the affordability of properties for people on low incomes or in receipt of benefits have been raised in publications produced by both the LGA and Shelter. In a recent publication, *Homelessness Projections: Core Homelessness in Great Britain*, Shelter reported that poverty is the greatest driver of homelessness in the country. Following on from this in *Housing our Homeless Households: A Summary Document*, the LGA highlighted the need for action to be taken to address the affordability of properties:

“Ultimately the long-term affordability of accommodation for low income households is a fundamental challenge that must be addressed at a national level in order to reduce homelessness and a widening gap between areas where households on low incomes can and cannot afford to live. Whilst activity by Councils may make a real difference it can only help up to a point if the fundamental position continues to worsen. The problems faced in accommodating homeless households have reached a point where a concerted effort by both national and local government is needed if a serious impact is to be made.” (LGA, page 4).

To help address this both Shelter and the LGA have called for the current freeze on the LHA, which restricts the amount that can be paid to applicants, to end. Shelter has

highlighted that taking this action will be crucial to address homelessness levels in the country moving forward:

“If the current freeze on Local Housing Allowance rates continues, by 2020 families in four-fifths of the country could face a gap between the support they need to pay their rent and the maximum support they are entitled to. Some 330,000 working families are likely to be affected. In order to help the many private tenants who could be at risk of homelessness because of the freeze, the Government must review Local Housing Allowance rates and ensure that housing benefits reflect actual housing costs”. (Shelter, Homelessness Reduction Bill: Second Reading (House of Commons), 2017).

Based on local data shared with the group, as detailed in this report, Members agree with the conclusions reached by both the LGA and Shelter. Furthermore, from 2018 the LHA is due to apply to residents living in the social rented sector who have been in their tenancy since April 2016 (or since April 2017 if they are living in supported accommodation). The group concluded that this provides added urgency for the level of the LHA to be addressed as this development could lead to a greater proportion of residents struggling to pay their rent and potentially falling into rent arrears. To address this the group is calling on the Leader of the Council to write to the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, the Rt. Hon. David Gauke MP, to urge him to end the freeze on LHA rates.

Recommendation 5	The Council’s Communications and Arts and Events teams should notify the CAB of any forthcoming events in Redditch which they could attend to promote their services and heighten awareness of their services in the Borough.
Financial Implications	There would be the cost of Officer time notifying the CAB of events.
Legal Implications	No legal implications have been identified.

CAB – Bromsgrove and Redditch

The CAB – Bromsgrove and Redditch provides essential advice services to local residents in relation to a number of key areas. The CAB currently has a contract with Redditch Borough Council to provide money and debt advice to local residents. The Council has also provided office accommodation to the CAB at Redditch Town Hall. This ensures that Redditch residents can access financial management and debt advice from the CAB at a central location in the town centre.

During the course of the review Members interviewed representatives of the CAB – Bromsgrove and Redditch and learned about the hard work that the organisation undertakes to support local residents. This includes providing face-to-face support and advice over the phone, using the CAB’s Adviceline system. Members have been advised that in 2016/17 a total of 7,989 Redditch residents were provided with face-to-face support by the CAB and 1,169 with support via Adviceline. The CAB can also provide residents with assistance in relation to court proceedings for matters such as

rent arrears and appealing against decisions in respect of Personal Independent Payments (PIPs) (for people with long-term medical conditions and disabilities). The group was impressed to learn that where the CAB has provided assistance in contesting PIP judgements 70 per cent of decisions had been overturned in favour of the client at tribunal.

However, despite the excellent work of the CAB Members had concerns that there was limited awareness amongst some residents and organisations in the local community of the service provided in Redditch. During the course of ward work undertaken by some Members of the group anecdotal reports were received suggesting that some residents and organisations were not aware that the CAB could be accessed at the Town Hall. Whilst this cannot be demonstrated using data obtained by the group Members agreed that this needed to be highlighted in their report and action should be taken to raise the profile of the CAB's services in the Borough.

During the group's interview with representatives of the CAB – Bromsgrove and Redditch it was acknowledged that further action could be taken to promote the availability of the organisation's services in Redditch. In particular Members feel that the participation of the CAB in local events and festivities would help to raise the profile of the organisation in the Borough. For example, the CAB could have a stand alongside other community groups at the annual Morton Stanley Festival. To ensure that the CAB is aware of all such opportunities the group is recommending that the Council's Communications and Art and Events Teams should notify CAB staff of any forthcoming events and activities so that staff in the organisation can take advantage of these opportunities to promote their services.

CHAPTER 4: ITEMS TO NOTE

There were a number of issues which Members wished to highlight in the report, though they did not form the basis of any recommendations.

a) Housing Options

During the course of the review Members received consistently positive feedback about the work of the Council's Housing Options team from VCS organisations. This positive feedback, which was provided verbally and without prompting, praised the work of Housing Options Officers to help people who were homeless or at risk of becoming homeless. A number of VCS organisations also compared Redditch Borough Council's Housing Options team favourably to other Housing Options team in the country, with Members being advised that Redditch Officers took a more compassionate approach to assisting customers and assessing their needs. The group was keen to highlight this positive feedback in their report to ensure that this existing good practice and the Officers involved receive the recognition they deserve.

b) Food Banks and Radiate Redditch Community Cafe

Members did visit a food bank, located at St Stephen's Church, during the course of the review. The group was impressed by the hard work undertaken by the organisers of the food bank to provide support to clients. In particular, Members recognised the value of the partnership working that enabled the food bank, and other organisations referring people to the food banks, to limit referrals to a maximum of three wherever possible. This approach should deter reliance on food banks to feed individuals and families whilst providing an opportunity for agencies to work with clients to identify and address their needs. The group would urge the Council to continue to provide support to local food banks by providing a location for food and other essential goods to be donated.

The group also visited the Radiate Redditch Community Café, which is held on the second Monday of the month at the Ecumenical Centre. The organisers of the café provide clients with an opportunity to eat a nutritious meal. Equally as important is the opportunity that the café provides for people to socialise, helping to build community cohesion and a sense of belonging. In recent years Radiate Redditch has successfully provided a Christmas meal to people who are homeless over the festive period. The group would like to commend Radiate Redditch and would urge other elected Members to learn more about their initiative.

c) Personal, Social, Health and Economic (PSHE) Lessons

During the course of the review Members were advised that many people became homeless, or were at risk of becoming homeless, once they started to struggle with their finances. In some cases financial difficulties would arise because there would be a delay between applying for and receiving benefits under Universal Credit and residents would fall into debts during the waiting period. The group was also advised that a significant number of people first started to struggle with their finances when they entered into a contract for a mobile phone or for cable television which they could not afford in the long-term, though the contracts often covered a significant period of time.

To address this, the group concluded that effective education in respect of financial management skills would be helpful to enable people to learn how to manage their personal budgets from an early age. Members are contending that this subject should be addressed in PSHE lessons at school. As the subject of PSHE lessons has recently formed the basis of recommendations made by the Mental Health Services for Young People Task Group, which is currently consulting with schools about PSHE lessons in the Borough, Members did not feel it would be appropriate for this to form the basis of a recommendation at this stage.

d) Voluntary and Community Sector Networking Opportunities

A number of the VCS groups consulted by Members expressed an interest in having opportunities to network with representatives of other local VCS organisations. To an extent Members believe that this could be addressed through increased participation in the Redditch Community Forum. The group did promote the forum to the representatives of the VCS organisations they interviewed. The Council may also want to consider taking additional action to promote the forum to VCS organisations.

In addition, many of the VCS organisations consulted by the group suggested that it would be helpful to have access to further information about the services available from other VCS groups in the local area. Members are aware that Officers are currently working to develop the Knowledge Bank, which will be accessible from the Council's website and provide further information about the services available from different groups operating in the Borough. When this service is launched in October 2017 Members are suggesting that this should be actively promoted, using various communications tools, to VCS organisations.

e) Landlords' Forum / Steering Group

There is a Landlords' Forum for Bromsgrove and Redditch which meets once a year. Underpinning this forum is the Private Sector Landlords' Steering Group. Unfortunately it was not possible in the short time available for Members to attend a meeting of either body to discuss the needs of landlords. Therefore, subject to the response received from the Overview and Scrutiny and Executive Committees, Members believe that arrangements should be made to present their report at a meeting, either of the forum or the steering group, so that their findings and the needs of landlords can be considered.

f) Short Sharp Reviews

This investigation of homelessness was undertaken as a short sharp review. Short sharp reviews can provide a useful opportunity for Members to consider a subject in detail and bring forward constructive proposals within a short space of time. However, lessons have been learned during the course of this review about some of the limitations of short sharp reviews. Due to the timing of the review, which coincided with one of the busiest holiday periods in the year, it could be difficult to arrange meetings that both Members and expert witnesses could attend. This meant that a significant number of meetings, 14 in total, had to be held in a period of two and a half months. As a consequence the review was very resource intensive which was challenging on occasion for both Members and Officers. The Overview and Scrutiny Committee is asked to make a note of these circumstances to ensure that lessons can be learned and applied to any future scrutiny activities.

CONCLUSION

The Homelessness Short Sharp Review has been a very intense exercise. The investigation was timely, given forthcoming legislative changes which could have a significant impact on homelessness in the country and on the work of local authorities. The review has also taken place at a time when homelessness is increasingly visible and unfortunately the number of homeless people in the country is growing.

There are a number of excellent services locally supporting people who are homeless or at risk of becoming homeless. The proposals brought forward by the group are intended to build on these services and to address any gaps in support that have been identified to the benefit of some of the most vulnerable people in society.

Members therefore commend their report to the Executive Committee and call for their recommendations to be approved.

APPENDIX 1

Scrutiny Proposal Form

(This form should be completed by sponsoring Member(s), Officers and / or members of the public when proposing an item for Scrutiny).

Note: The matters detailed below have not yet received any detailed consideration. The Overview and Scrutiny Committee reserves the right to reject suggestions for scrutiny that fall outside the Borough Council's remit.

Proposer's name and designation	Councillor Joe Baker	Date of referral	28/03/17
Proposed topic title	Homelessness Short, Sharp Review		
Link to local priorities including the strategic purposes	The subject of this proposed review links to the following strategic purposes: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Help me to find somewhere to live in my locality.• Help me to live my life independently (including health and activity).• Help me to be financially independent.		
Background to the issue	<p>In recent months there has been increasing public awareness of homelessness in Redditch. In particular, rough sleeping in areas located close to the Redditch ringway has received significant media attention. Residents I have spoken to are understandably concerned about homelessness and are keen to find out what action the Council can take to address this.</p> <p>I am aware that the causes of homelessness are varied and often multi-faceted. In some cases people can make themselves intentionally homeless. There can also be hidden homelessness, with people relying on friends for a bed for the night. I feel that given the current level of public interest in this situation it would be helpful if a scrutiny exercise could provide some clarity about the situation and identify any additional action that could be taken, either by the Council or partner organisations, to address homelessness levels.</p> <p>Earlier in my career I worked with homeless people in Scotland. I therefore feel I have useful background knowledge and would appreciate the opportunity to Chair this review if it is endorsed by Members.</p>		

<p>Key Objectives Please keep to SMART objectives (Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant and Timely)</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) To review relevant Council policies and practices in respect of people experiencing or at risk of becoming homeless. 2) To establish the current levels of homelessness in Redditch, taking into account any official statistics. 3) To clarify the potential causes of homelessness. (This could take into account issues such as recent Benefits changes and drug and alcohol addictions). 4) To analyse the potential impact of homelessness on a person's physical and mental health. 5) To assess the existing support available to people who are homeless or at risk of becoming homeless. This should take into account support provided by public, private and Voluntary and Community Sector organisations. 6) To scrutinise the potential impact of the new Homelessness Reduction Bill on homelessness levels. 7) To review the findings of any scrutiny Task Groups that have investigated homelessness in other parts of the country and to identify any actions arising from these reports which could be usefully replicated in Redditch. 8) To investigate any opportunities for organisations to work in partnership to enhance support to people who are homeless or at risk of becoming homeless. This could include working in partnership to provide hostel accommodation. 9) To identify any additional action that the Council could take to address homelessness in the Borough.
<p>How long do you think is needed to complete this exercise? (Where possible please estimate the number of weeks, months and meetings required)</p>	<p>The Overview and Scrutiny Committee agreed on 28th March that this should be a Short, Sharp Review lasting three months. At the end of these three months the group should produce an interim report and discuss with the Committee whether further work should be undertaken.</p>

Please return this form to: Jess Bayley or Amanda Scarce, Democratic Services Officers, Redditch Borough Council, Town Hall, Walter Stranz Square, Redditch, B98 8AH

Email: jess.bayley@bromsgroveandredditch.gov.uk / a.scarce@bromsgroveandredditch.gov.uk

APPENDIX 2
Acknowledgements

The group would like to thank the following people for providing evidence during the course of their review:

Derek Allen, Housing Strategy Manager
Sarah Barcham, Redditch Food Banks
Matthew Bough, Housing Strategy and Enabling Team Leader
Kevin Dicks, Chief Executive
Rachael Dobson, Assistant Financial Support Manager
Sam Dyde, YMCA
Ali Grimmett, Planning Officer
Sonia Hambidge, CAB – Bromsgrove and Redditch
Lynn Hancock, CAB – Bromsgrove and Redditch
Anne Marie Harley, Communications Manager
Brenda Holden, Housing Options Manager
Sarah Leeson, Radiate Redditch
Alan Moorhouse, YMCA
Ben Rafiqi, Radiate Redditch
Susan Sadler, Redditch Night Stop
Amanda Scarce, Democratic Services Officer
Steve Shammon, Private Sector Housing Team Leader
Councillor Mark Shurmer, Portfolio Holder for Housing
Amanda Singleton, Head of Customer Access and Financial Support
Liz Tompkin, Head of Housing
Hayley Turner, St Basils

APPENDIX 3
Timeline of Activities

Date	Task Group Activity
14/06/17	Considering the group's terms of reference and identifying sources of evidence.
20/06/17	Reviewing the outcomes of the 2006 Homelessness Prevention review and the findings of the Preventing Homelessness in Bromsgrove Task Group.
30/06/17	Interview with the Strategic Housing Manager to discuss Housing in the Private Rented Sector.
04/07/17	Interview with the Head of Housing and Housing Options Manager and pre-scrutiny of the Council's Housing Allocations Policy.
12/07/17	Interview with the Head of Customer Access and Financial Support about recent welfare changes and financial support for residents.
17/07/17	Interview with the Private Sector Housing Team Leader regarding HMOs.
31/07/17	Interview with the Portfolio Holder for Housing and consideration of the Housing our Homeless Households summary report, (published by the LGA) and The Gold Standard: Fighting Homelessness article in the CCA Voice publication.
02/08/17	Interview with the Manager of the Redditch branch of St Basils and interview with the Communications Manager about the Council's homelessness campaign.
09/08/17 Part 1	Interview with the Manager of Redditch Night Stop and considering Shelter's report in respect of the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017.
09/08/17 Part 2	Interview with Officers representing the YMCA.
14/08/17	Interview with representatives of Radiate Redditch during a visit to their community café at the Ecumenical Centre.
16/08/17 Part 1	Visit to the food bank at St Stephen's Church and interview with the Project Manager for the food bank.

16/08/17 Part 2	Interview with representatives of the CAB – Bromsgrove and Redditch.
23/08/17	Considering further information about Housing First and agreeing the group's final recommendations.

APPENDIX 4

Affordable Housing Definitions

The group has been advised that the Council has adopted the Department of Communities and Local Government's (DCLG's) definitions of affordable housing, as stated within Annex 2 of the National Planning Policy Framework (March 2012). The following definitions are included within this:

Affordable housing is social rented, affordable rented and intermediate housing, provided to eligible households whose needs are not met by the market. Eligibility is determined with regard to local incomes and local house prices. Affordable housing should include provisions to remain at an affordable price for future eligible households or for the subsidy to be recycled for alternative affordable housing provision.

Social rented housing is: owned by local authorities and private registered providers (as defined in section 80 of the Housing and Regeneration Act 2008), for which guideline target rents are determined through the national rent regime. It may also be owned by other persons and provided under equivalent rental arrangements to the above, as agreed with the local authority or with the Homes and Communities Agency (HCA).

Affordable rented housing is: let by local authorities or private registered providers of social housing to households who are eligible for social rented housing. Affordable Rent is subject to rent controls that require a rent of no more than 80% of the local market rent (including service charges, where applicable).

Intermediate housing is: homes for sale and rent provided at a cost above social rent, but below market levels subject to the criteria in the Affordable Housing definition above. These can include shared equity (shared ownership and equity loans), other low cost homes for sale and intermediate rent, but not affordable rented housing.