

REPORT TO: Executive Board
DATE: 9 September 2009
REPORTING OFFICER: Strategic Director – Health & Community
SUBJECT: Temporary Accommodation
WARD(S) Borough-wide

1.0 PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

1.1 To advise Members of proposed changes to the use of Grangeway Court (GWC) and to seek approval to implement the necessary change to the Council's Housing Allocations Policy as set out in the body of the report following a period of consultation with Registered Social Landlord (RSL) partners.

2.0 RECOMMENDATION:

That Executive Board Members:

- i) note and approve the proposed change in use of Grangeway Court (GWC) to supported housing.**
- ii) note the complementary amendment required to the Council's Housing Allocations Policy to facilitate this change and agree that households placed at GWC as a preventative solution to a threat of homelessness are awarded 600 points on the Council's Housing Register.**

3.0 BACKGROUND

3.1 There has been a major shift in the way Councils have been encouraged to manage homelessness by Central Government over the last few years. This has resulted in an increased emphasis on early intervention and prevention strategies rather than 'crisis management'. This replicates the approach taken in other service areas.

3.2 The move towards a more comprehensive preventative approach to homelessness requires the prevention ethos to be embedded in all the service processes and in the whole approach to 'managing' homelessness. Whilst the statutory provisions have not changed in recent years and remain intact as a safety net, the preventative agenda focuses on outcomes for customers i.e. finding solutions that prevent homelessness and reduces the need to use 'temporary accommodation' at the point of crisis.

3.3 In addition all Local Authorities with housing responsibilities are tasked with meeting a Government target that their use of temporary accommodation for homeless households will reduce by 50% by 2010.

4.0 **CHANGE TO USE OF GWC**

4.1 It is interesting to note that LAs upheld as models of good practice often have not actually reduced demand, but have changed the way demand is managed. For example more cases are dealt with in line with the prevention agenda than the statutory provisions.

4.2 Successive meetings with the Specialist Homelessness Advisers from Communities and Local Government (CLG) have been helpful in suggesting a way to resolve this situation. It is proposed that GWC be re-designated as supported housing rather than temporary accommodation. This means that it is considered to be supported housing that is available to households threatened with homelessness and therefore is accommodation that *prevents* homelessness, rather than is accommodation that is provided under the provisions of the statutory homelessness legislation i.e. pending formal enquiries and following acceptance of a statutory homelessness duty. GWC is ideally suited to a preventative approach as the accommodation is wholly self-contained and support is provided via the Supporting People commissioning process.

4.3 Halton currently adopts this preventative approach for single households and suitable hostel placement is usually seen as 'homelessness prevention'. Single applicants in hostel accommodation such as the YMCA once registered on the Council's Housing Register receive 'hostel points' and 'sharing facility points'. This points weighting is sufficient to facilitate move on from hostel accommodation and throughput to prevent 'bed blocking.'

4.4 Discussions with the new support provider at GWC, Arena have indicated that this change in approach would not affect the service provided, or the Supporting People contract between the Council and Arena.

5.0 **CHANGE TO THE COUNCIL'S ALLOCATION POLICY**

5.1 A change in the Council's Allocations Policy will be required, as it does not currently specifically assist those ready to move on from supported housing. The use of GWC as supported housing rather than temporary accommodation would require a mechanism to facilitate 'move on' to other forms of housing. Without this minor change in the Council's Allocations Policy, a preventative placement in 'supported housing' would not be perceived as an attractive

option, if ultimately there was no pathway into social housing.

5.2 It is proposed therefore that families in supported accommodation are dealt with in practice in the same manner as singles in hostel accommodation i.e. they are awarded points to facilitate move on (600 is suggested based on some analysis undertaken by Halton Housing Trust on the current waiting list and points categories.) It must be anticipated that the number of customers with 700 points relating to 'statutory homeless category' will fall in line with a reduction in the overall number of statutory homeless households as a result of the new 'preventative' approach. It is felt therefore that the proposed change in approach will not adversely affect throughput or will be detrimental to customers accommodated at GWC. In addition this situation can be monitored to ensure the right balance between 'points categories' is maintained.

5.3 The use of the private rented sector and the Council's Bond Guarantee Scheme should also be actively encouraged to end the culture of dependency on social housing, as being the only means to resolve housing difficulties and to facilitate move on from supported housing. This shift in mindset is important as the focus should be on finding a solution to accommodation difficulties, rather than perceiving social housing as the only option, especially given the backdrop of growing waiting lists for social housing.

6.0 **OTHER FORMS OF TEMPORARY ACCOMMODATION**

6.1 The process of re-designating GWC to supported housing would mean that a small number of temporary accommodation units would need to be secured, as there will in all probability still be a need to provide temporary accommodation for households where there is a statutory duty and homelessness could not be prevented. In line with the Government target a maximum of 16 units of temporary accommodation would be required. However it is felt due to improvements in service delivery and current performance in preventing homelessness that far fewer units of temporary accommodation are required at this point in time.

6.2 It is recommended that officers negotiate with partner RSLs to lease initially up to four units of accommodation to be used as temporary accommodation on a pilot basis. Alternatively an arrangement with a private landlord could be considered which is possibly more advantageous regarding the ability to end a licence agreement more quickly in circumstances where the Council does not have the 'main Housing Duty' under the homelessness legislation. Both alternatives need to be assessed to determine the preferred option.

9.0 **FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS**

9.1 It is recommended that the Council enter into arrangements with one

or more of the RSLs, or private sector landlords to source a small number of units of accommodation which can be used as temporary accommodation under the provisions of the statutory homelessness legislation.

9.2 This will incur a cost should the unit(s) of temporary accommodation remain unoccupied for any period of time. When occupied Housing Benefit will normally be paid, or the occupier eligible to pay the costs of the accommodation provided. It is difficult to anticipate the likelihood and frequency of the units being vacant. Entering into an agreement for say two units of accommodation initially should prove to be a valuable test of the demand and pattern of any 'rent loss'. The Council would ensure that the lease or licence was favourable in terms of terminating clauses should the need arise. This would reduce any financial risk to the Council.

9.3 It is anticipated that the Council will have to furnish a small number of units, so that households can immediately occupy. On average a furniture package is approximately £2,000. Expenditure (based on demand over the last 6 months) is not expected to exceed £10k and will be linked to the overall number of temporary accommodation units secured. This expenditure can be met from existing budgets.

10.0 **POLICY IMPLICATIONS**

10.1 The changes outlined in this report set out a direction of travel that is consistent with the changes we have already made in Halton to shift the focus of the service to prevent homelessness wherever possible, rather than deal with households at the point of crisis. The emphasis should be on resolving accommodation issues where possible, or facilitating a move to accommodation prior to homelessness occurring.

10.2 As outlined above changes to the Council's housing Allocations Policy will be required to achieve improvements in service delivery and in order to meet targets related to the statutory homelessness function.

10.3 Homelessness is a statutory function and directly contributes to several of the Council's Corporate Priorities.

11.0 **IMPLICATIONS FOR THE COUNCIL'S PRIORITIES**

11.1 **Children & Young People in Halton**

Improved use and throughput of customers in supported accommodation will enable those in the most need of supported accommodation to benefit from an increased availability of supported bed spaces in the Borough.

11.2 **Employment, Learning & Skills in Halton**

Providing a stable living environment has a positive impact on an individual's opportunity for work, education and learning.

11.3 **A Healthy Halton**

Improving the performance of the statutory homelessness service and offering more households preventative solutions will reduce the negative effects that being homeless can have on an individual's health and well being.

11.4 **A Safer Halton**

Improving the availability and type of temporary accommodation for customers that present particular needs and risks such as ex-offenders will ensure that these customers can be accommodated in more suitable accommodation and with less impact on budgets. This should help reduce re-offending rates.

11.5 **Halton's Urban Renewal**

None identified.

12.0 **RISK ANALYSIS**

12.1 The Council should ensure that a preventative approach to homelessness is embedded in the Council's Allocations Policy and service delivery processes. Failure to build on the progress made over the last two years will undermine the Council's ambitions to deliver an excellent Housing Solutions Service.

12.2 Statistics relating to temporary accommodation usage (including bed and breakfast use) and official acceptance rates are monitored by Communities for Local Government and are viewed as a barometer indicating how well the Council is performing in this service area. This is being monitored through NI 156 – the number of households living in temporary accommodation provided under the homelessness legislation. Halton's target is to only have 16 households in temporary accommodation by 2010. At the end of the last quarter i.e. 30 June 2009 there were 33 homeless households in temporary accommodation. This target presents a particular problem for Halton as Members will be aware that Grangeway Court (which is owned by the Council) consisting of 32 units of self-contained accommodation is currently used to provide temporary accommodation for households who are homeless.

12.3 Halton Housing Trust (HHT) has agreed that should the Council proceed with this change, it will not incur any additional charge from HHT in respect of the current SLA regarding management of the

Council's Housing Register. The next stage if members approve the proposed change is to consult with the other RSLs in the Borough ahead of implementing any changes to the Council's Housing Allocations Policy. This is a statutory requirement. However given the relatively small scale of the change it is not felt necessary to consult on a wider basis.

12.4 If the Council chooses not to re-designate GWC it will not meet the temporary accommodation target and temporary accommodation use will appear high compared to some of our neighbours. This will have an adverse effect on any service inspections and on the Council's CAA score. It is also unlikely that further improvements will be seen in relation to levels of statutory homeless acceptances. Changing the use of GWC and adopting an increased emphasis on prevention will dramatically reduce statutory acceptance rates.

12.5 The Council's current over reliance on GWC as temporary accommodation also means that when households are deemed unsuitable for GWC, or GWC does not meet the requirements of the customer, the Council's only alternative is to use B&B. A temporary accommodation plan should consider the merits of a range of possible models of temporary accommodation, not rely wholly on one source.

13.0 **EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY ISSUES**

13.1 The changes to service delivery will not discrimination due to age, gender, disability, religion, sexual orientation or ethnic origin and will assist some of the most vulnerable groups in our local community.

14.0 **LIST OF BACKGROUND PAPERS UNDER SECTION 100D OF THE LOCAL GOVERNMENT ACT 1972**

Document	Place of Inspection	Contact Officer
Housing Allocations Policy	Municipal Building Widnes	Steve Williams Housing Strategy Manager