

**THE ROYAL BOROUGH OF KENSINGTON AND CHELSEA****HOUSING AND PROPERTY SCRUTINY COMMITTEE****24 SEPTEMBER 2014****LIVE ISSUES REPORT BY THE DIRECTOR OF HOUSING**

The purpose of this report is to inform Members of recent policy and practice developments, which are likely to impact on the future work of the Business Group and to update Members on progress of current projects.

**FOR INFORMATION****1.0 EEA Migrant hostel residents and rough sleepers**

- 1.1 Central Government made changes to benefit entitlement for all EEA nationals outside of the UK and ROI from 1 April 2014. The changes may affect rough sleepers' eligibility for supported accommodation and there is also a risk to supported housing providers due to rent arrears and lack of move on options for affected EEA residents.
- 1.2 An audit has been carried out into RBKC's supported accommodation to identify affected residents. At the time of writing the number is approximately 30. A full assessment of each case has yet to be completed.
- 1.3 In addition there are five to six EEA nationals who have no recourse to public funds currently in hospital receiving treatment for mental illnesses who are ready for discharge.
- 1.4 The number of rough sleepers in RBKC without recourse to public funds is fluid, but at the time of writing they make up approximately 70 per cent of the total cohort.
- 1.5 Those affected by the new legislation will have varying support needs and vulnerabilities that will require a tailored approach. Cases in temporary accommodation have yet to be identified.
- 1.6 RBKC is developing an action plan that will:
  - Ensure that all those affected by the changes are supported to understand the new legislation and possible implications.
  - Prevent rent arrears for hostel providers and personal debt for residents.

- Identify the most vulnerable residents and develop individual action plans to support their move on.
- Continue to work with reconnection agencies and the Home Office to maintain a reduction in the number of rough sleepers.
- Work with the GLA and other London boroughs to ensure a consistent message and mitigate displacement.

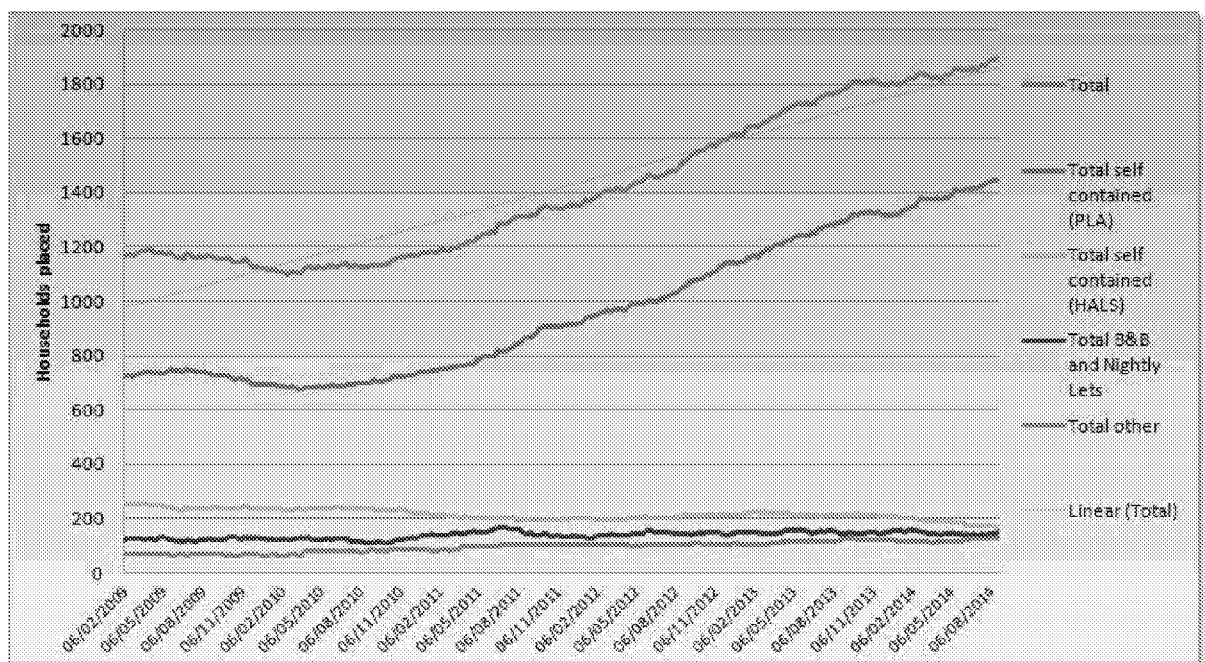
1.7 A question and answer session for providers and partner agencies has been scheduled for 12 September 2014.

## 2.0 Temporary Accommodation Update

2.1 Temporary Accommodation numbers continue to increase, with total numbers in all forms of temporary accommodation now at 1894.

End of month figures	
Apr-14	1830
May-14	1855
Jun-14	1859
Jul-14	1869
Aug-14	1894

2.2 This is split into accommodation type as follows:



2.3 Generally the increase in demand is being met through self contained (PLA) accommodation procured through private letting agents and registered social landlords but our ability to procure enough accommodation to meet demand is becoming progressively more difficult. The prevailing Local Housing Allowance is significantly

under existing market rates and as a result there is a substantial shortage of accommodation available to us.

- 2.4 In the last few weeks we have been forced to place a number of families into bed and breakfast accommodation. At one stage we had 12 families, all with children, in this type of shared accommodation. Although none were above the 6 week limit, finding suitable alternatives to move families to remains a very difficult task.
- 2.5 This is exacerbated by the high level of properties that landlords and letting agents are seeking to remove from the scheme due to the prospect of receiving much higher rents from renting privately or from more profitable rival schemes. Officers are agreeing rent increases within certain parameters to ensure that properties remain with us, but alongside this we continually receive weekly requests for additional properties to be returned. Currently there are over 70 properties that landlords or agents want removed from our schemes and moving the families currently living in this accommodation is an ongoing priority, hence the increase in use of bed and breakfast accommodation as an interim measure.
- 2.6 Although officers are doing what they can to negotiate with agents and landlords, recent analysis indicates that Local Housing Allowance rates in the West London areas for 2 bed and 3 bed accommodation are on average £80 per week lower than the bottom 30<sup>th</sup> per cent of the private market, making it almost impossible to access or to compete with. In areas where the private market is slightly more achievable such as in East London where we currently have a high number of households placed, competition from other Boroughs has led to high incentives and rents being offered causing landlords and agents heads to seek greater profits.

### **3.0 Local Support Services Framework**

- 3.1 On the 10 July DWP announced that the Westminster City Council led bid with RBKC to run a formal pilot for Universal Credit Local Support Service Framework (LSSF) in both boroughs had been successful.
- 3.2 The LSSF pilot will evaluate data across four different projects offering workless support delivered by FACES, Welfare Reform Team (WCC) and the RBKC Housing and Worklessness Project's underemployed pilot with North Kensington Job Centre Plus. The Digital Service project is an aspect of support that could be provided to cohorts in or out of the above projects.

- 3.3 Collectively the projects focus on supporting:
- the hardest to help clients into work in both boroughs,
  - social housing tenants that are in work or self employed and claiming 100% housing benefit in RBKC,
  - and those at risk of homelessness in the private rented sector and those living in Westminster City Council commissioned temporary accommodation.
- 3.4 The LSSF pilot is due to begin on 1 September 2014 and RBKC Economic Development team is part of the steering committee for the pilot.

#### **4.0 Supported Housing Procurement**

- 4.1 The Supported Housing Commissioning team will be embarking on major procurement from September 2014 for the next 12-18 months. The procurement exercise will consist of re-providing approximately 25 contracts (500 units of supported accommodation) to 10 contracts.
- 4.2 The team have worked in partnership with Health and Tri-Borough colleagues and current service providers to ensure that services commissioned will be of good quality and provided in partnership. The end result being safe, flexible and responsive services to the ever changing needs of the clients that are presenting.
- 4.3 Contracts will be for five years, with a possible extension of two years, subject to providers attaining a good performance level throughout the life of the contract. By issuing contracts with longer terms, this encourages greater partnership, fostering lean and agile business planning and medium term planning for our provision.
- 4.4 The tender process is set to save the Housing Department approximately £300,000. This will be achieved by rationalising the number of contracts we have, whilst maintaining diversity and competition within the marketplace and ensuring stability of provision by minimising the risks of contracting with just one or two contractors.
- 4.5 The new provision will provide a more enhanced support package for the clients and an enhanced housing management offer, which informs wider Health, Community Safety, Children's and Adult Social Care outcomes.

## **5.0 Grenfell Tower Works**

- 5.1 The following provides an update on the major works being undertaken at Grenfell Tower, last reported to the Scrutiny Committee in July 2014.
- 5.2 The work to the tower includes external over-cladding, new windows, replacement of communal boilers, new individual boilers, fire safety and ventilation work in communal areas and cyclical decorative works.
- 5.3 The works will create seven new homes at the tower and the re-provision of the boxing club and nursery that were previously located at the tower.

### **The Programme**

- 5.4 Work has commenced with the demolition of the canopy and stripping out of the Social Services office. Access equipment is being erected on the building for the cladding installation. Rydons have appointed two resident liaison officers who are on site to provide advice and information for residents.

### **The Nursery**

- 5.5 In April 2014 a lease was agreed for the nursery to be located at the resource centre for a 16 month period. RBKC's Family and Children Services (FCS) are working with the nursery to ensure they are clear about their expectations before a decision is made on who will occupy the new nursery on a permanent basis. The nursery is scheduled to be completed by September 2015.

### **The Boxing Club**

- 5.6 The Dale Youth Club surrendered the lease of ground floor premises at the tower on 1 August 2014. They have been decanted to premises at Lowerwood Court under a 'Tenancy at Will' pending the completion of the refurbishment works.

### **The Housing Office**

- 5.7 The housing office has now been re-located to offices previously used by the Estate Management Board.
- 5.8 Plans are still being considered in regards to converting the space vacated by the Housing Office to residential accommodation. The ground floor entrance area that was originally part of the housing



office, together with concierge desk is also being reviewed, and consultation will be held with residents to look at whether a community space would be an appropriate use.

## **6.0 Fire Doors**

- 6.1 In July we reported that the number of non-compliant leaseholder flat entrance doors had decreased from 37 to 11. This figure has reduced to 3 non-compliant doors, the remainder being confirmed compliant.
- 6.2 One of the remaining non-compliant doors belongs to an elderly lady who told that she could not afford the cost of replacing the door. She was put in touch with Staying First who carry out small repairs and maintenance work for vulnerable or elderly people that cannot afford the cost of the works. Staying First are now in the process of booking an appointment with her to replace the door.
- 6.3 Another of the doors belongs to a property where the TMO have recently undertaken fireproofing works. The leaseholder was of the view that this work had included works that would make their door complaint, but this is not consistent with the records of the TMO or their contractor who carried out the works. If an agreement cannot be reached with the leaseholder the Fire Service will be advised and enforcement action will commence.
- 6.4 The final door belongs to a leaseholder that we have had little engagement with despite contacting them by letter and telephone calls. The leaseholder will be referred to the Fire Service, which will ultimately lead to enforcement action being pursued if they continue not to engage with us.

## **FOR INFORMATION**

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**Background Papers used in the Preparation of this Report:** None  
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