

Report to:	ADULT SOCIAL CARE AND HEALTH SCRUTINY COMMITTEE
Relevant Officer:	Mrs Sharon Davis, Scrutiny Manager
Date of Meeting:	17 March 2021

SUPPORTED HOUSING SCRUTINY REVIEW INTERIM REPORT

1.0 Purpose of the report:

1.1 To set out the interim findings and recommendations of the Supported Housing Scrutiny Review.

2.0 Recommendation(s):

2.1 To recommend to the Executive that Blackpool Council establishes its own standards for what supported housing should look like in the town and that scrutiny plays an active role in developing these standards.

2.2 To recommend to the Executive that the Council writes a letter to the local MPs setting out the key issues relating to supported housing in the town and requests that they lobby Government for new legislation that allows for more control over the sector.

2.3 That the Scrutiny Panel reconvenes in due course to consider the issue of 'out of area placements' further.

3.0 Reasons for recommendation(s):

3.1 The recommendations aim to improve provision of supported accommodation in the town.

3.2 Is the recommendation contrary to a plan or strategy adopted or approved by the Council? No

3.3 Is the recommendation in accordance with the Council's approved budget? Yes

4.0 Other alternative options to be considered:

4.1 None.

5.0 Council priority:

5.1 The relevant Council priority is:

- Communities: Creating stronger communities and increasing resilience.

6.0 Background information

- 6.1 The Adult Social Care and Health Scrutiny Committee first received a report on the provision of supported housing on 7 January 2020. The report provided an overview of supported housing in the town, defining supported housing as any housing scheme where accommodation is provided alongside care (not necessarily commissioned social care), support or supervision to help people live as independently as possible in the community. This includes:
- Older people with support needs
 - People with learning and physical disabilities
 - Individuals and families at risk of or recovering from homelessness
 - People recovering from drug or alcohol dependency
 - Offenders and ex-offenders
 - Vulnerable young people (such as care leavers or teenage parents)
 - People with mental ill health
 - People at risk of domestic abuse.
- 6.2 The Committee learnt during the course of the meeting that supported housing was funded through housing benefit, that there had been an increase in the number of supported accommodation schemes in the area over the previous few years, that due to the nature of the schemes they could attract very high rents and service charges which landlords expected to be met through housing benefit and that schemes did not always attract full subsidy from the Department of Work and Pensions and could therefore be costly to the local authority.
- 6.3 Key concerns raised during the meeting included the cost of supported housing, with the average weekly rent per tenant varying between £79.90 and £355.58 per week; the lack of regulation of providers – although national standards for supported housing had been produced they were guidance and not legally enforceable; and that vulnerable people with mixed and sometimes conflicting needs were often placed together with support that was not appropriate to meet their needs. The Committee therefore determined that a scrutiny review be established to further investigate supported housing.
- 6.4 The Review Panel was established comprising Members of the Adult Social Care and Health Scrutiny Committee and three Members of the Tourism, Economy and Community Scrutiny Committee due to the cross-cutting nature of the issue. It was originally scheduled to meet during March 2020, however, due to the Covid-19 pandemic the meeting was postponed and the Review Panel eventually held its first meeting in November 2020. At this first meeting, Members were informed that the Council had successfully bid to participate in a pilot scheme related to supported housing with the Ministry of Communities, Housing and Local Government. As part of the pilot, the authority would be looking to use the existing tools, powers and regulations in order to try and influence supported housing developments and

gain some control over the support provided to residents and where the provision was located. This would then create an evidence base to be submitted to Government to allow them to see what worked and what might need changing in order to gain control of the issue.

- 6.5 During the first Panel meeting Members delved deeper into the concerns raised that vulnerable people were not receiving the support they needed and it was considered that the pilot scheme would offer an increased level of scrutiny on quality standards. Concern was also raised regarding the high levels of supported housing in some wards where former, large holiday accommodation was situated. The prevalence on some particular roads or areas often resulted in high levels of anti-social behaviour which affected local residents and could have a detrimental impact on the wider population and it was noted that the pilot aimed to address this issue. Planning and legal advice over the control and location of supported housing was also being considered as a key part of the pilot.
- 6.6 The Review Panel met for a second time in March 2021 to consider a number of aspects of supported housing in more detail including the existing thresholds and current criteria to be met, how risks and vulnerabilities of people in the accommodation were identified, the cost to the Council and the current and potential future roles of the Council.
- 6.7 Key areas of discussion during the meeting included the difference between matched and unmatched supported accommodation, the extent to which tenants were known to Adult Social Care, the potential exploitation of vulnerable adults, an update on the pilot scheme and the large number of people placed in supported accommodation from outside of the Blackpool area.
- 6.8 Members considered that despite the fact that they would currently be unenforceable, work should begin on the Blackpool standards for supported accommodation. The Blackpool standards could go over and above the national standards as appropriate to set out the Council's aspiration for support and accommodation in the town. There could be separate standards dependent on the tenant and support required. It was noted that during the pilot process, it had been suggested that local standards would be appropriate and the Panel considered that Scrutiny should have an active involvement in the development of the standards.
- 6.9 It was considered that the key change required to ensure improvement in support housing provision was for stronger legislation to be introduced in order to allow the Council to take action on providers to make improvements and compel them to engage with the Council more thoroughly in order to identify whether the scheme was appropriate for the town in the first instance. Stronger legislation could give the Council more influence over location, type as well as quality of provision.
- 6.10 A final key area of concern identified during the meeting was the high number of vulnerable people being brought in from out of area by providers in order to take places within supported housing in the town. Concern was raised that some other local authorities might

be aware of the practice and appointed agencies to locate vulnerable and difficult to place adults in Blackpool, resulting in a person outside of their home town with no local connections and therefore increasing their vulnerability. It was noted that in 2018, 84% of all new housing benefit claimants (including but not exclusive to those in supported housing) in Blackpool had been made by adults from out of the area. Members considered that this issue required further investigation to determine whether any action could be taken in order to influence future placements from out of the area.

6.11 The Review Panel agreed that in order to progress with the recommendations identified as quickly as possible that an interim report of the Panel be submitted for consideration by the Executive with a further meeting established in due course to consider the outstanding issues. Following approval by the Adult Social Care and Health Scrutiny Committee, a summary report will be provided to the Executive for approval.

6.12 Does the information submitted include any exempt information? No

7.0 List of Appendices:

7.1 None.

8.0 Financial considerations:

8.1 The recommendations can be implemented within existing resources.

9.0 Legal considerations:

9.1 The Blackpool standards referred to in the recommendation at 2.1 would not be legally enforceable without a change to legislation.

10.0 Risk management considerations:

10.1 None.

11.0 Equalities considerations:

11.1 None.

12.0 Sustainability, climate change and environmental considerations:

12.1 None.

13.0 Internal/external consultation undertaken:

13.1 None.

14.0 Background papers:

14.1 None.