

Report to:	TOURISM, ECONOMY AND COMMUNITIES SCRUTINY COMMITTEE
Relevant Officer:	Vikki Piper, Head of Housing
Date of Meeting:	23 November 2022

HOUSING AND HOMELESSNESS ANNUAL REPORT

1.0 Purpose of the report:

1.1 To update the Committee on key pieces of housing and homelessness work being undertaken, service performance, and progress made.

2.0 Recommendation(s):

2.1 To note the Housing and Homelessness update, and identify any areas for additional scrutiny, or support.

3.0 Reasons for recommendation(s):

3.1 To ensure that the Committee retains oversight of the housing and homelessness issues

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 Not applicable

5.0 Council priority:

5.1 The relevant Council priority is

- "The economy: Maximising growth and opportunity across Blackpool"
- "Communities: Creating stronger communities and increasing resilience"

6.0 Background information

6.1 Scrutiny Committee completed a review of housing and homelessness during 2019/20 and made several recommendations.

6.2 One of these recommendations was for the Tourism, Economy and Communities Scrutiny Committee to receive an annual report on Housing and Homelessness, informing them of work undertaken, performance and funding received. This is the second annual report.

6.3 Does the information submitted include any exempt information? No

7.0 Housing - Key Developments/ Pieces of work undertaken

7.1 Grange Park:

Work is progressing well on phase 1 of the site, and has now commenced on phase 2. This £20 million project, will provide 131 new homes for affordable rent, comprised of 2 to 6 bed houses, bungalows, and new sheltered housing.

With the support of the European Social Fund, and council investment, these new homes will have a number of energy saving measures and technologies, including 30 ground source heat pumps, in order to reduce the carbon footprint.

7.2 Troutbeck

The final units have now been completed on this scheme, totalling 75 new affordable homes, a number of which have been customised to meet the needs of disabled families.

7.3 Awards

Blackpool added to its success at the Inside Housing Awards in November 2021, by coming away with 3 awards from the Northern Housing Awards in May this year. The Council once again picked up "Council of the Year", and our ALMO, Blackpool Coastal Housing also collected 2 awards for "Best Approach to Diversity and Inclusion" and "Best Approach to Employee Wellbeing".

7.4 Supported Housing

Blackpool Council is one of 4 Councils to be awarded a first share of the Government's £20m funding for the Supported Housing Improvement Programme (SHIP).

At a visit to Blackpool in June this year, Housing Minister (Eddie Hughes MP) announced that this funding would allow Blackpool "to build on their successful pilot schemes", and stated that "this work is already benefitting local communities by tackling poor practice and improving conditions for vulnerable tenants".

The SHIP will enable Blackpool Council to continue the work of the pilot to work with providers to drive up standards, tackle poor quality accommodation and support, and ensure providers are clear on the needs of the town, to ensure that the Council has the right accommodation, for the right people, in the right place.

7.5 **Foxhall Village**

Work continues to complete the stalled development at Foxhall Village, and progress has been made.

In October this year Great Places submitted a revised planning application to deliver 67 new homes on the remainder of the site, which was approved by the Council

The Council will continue to work with Great Places to ensure this scheme reaches completion.

7.6 **Blackpool Housing Company/Lumen**

Due to pressures in the housing market (significant price inflation) and in development (material and labour costs and availability), BHC /Lumen's planned rate of growth has been adjusted within their respective Business Plans to reflect these challenges. Both businesses are still continuing to bring through much needed quality homes within Blackpool's inner wards. Stock numbers now stand at 557 for BHC in the private rented sector and 39 affordable rent homes for Lumen (596 homes in group letting). This represents an increase of 67 for BHC and 23 for Lumen from the time of the last report. Lumen's development programme has also attracted Homes England grant support of just under £1.2m since commencement in November 2020.

7.7 **Levelling Up**

A significant amount of resource has been taken up through 2022 in engaging with the Department of Levelling up Homes and Communities (DLUCH) and Homes England (HE) on potential Levelling Up plans, which will bring significant investment to the town and enable us to tackle the route of Blackpool's housing problems.

7.8 In March this year the Secretary of State (Michael Gove MP) made the following announcement:

Longstanding neglect by some local landlords has led to Blackpool experiencing some of the worst housing conditions in the country, with at least 1 in 3 properties classified as 'non-decent'.

An expanded local enforcement team will take tough action against those not meeting existing standards and measure landlords against future national standards. This beefed-up inspection regime will tackle exploitation in the local private rented sector and supported housing market driving up housing quality and protecting the most vulnerable.

Alongside this enforcement drive, Homes England will join forces with Blackpool Council, using additional funding of £650,000 to explore regeneration opportunities to improve Blackpool's housing stock and quality of place.

7.9 Since this time there has been considerable political change, but the Council has been working closely throughout with DLUCH and HE on the details of an enforcement pilot, and capital business case.

7.10 **Homelessness – service delivery**

7.11 **National data and comparisons - 2021/2022**

All local authorities are required to provide quarterly uploads on homelessness data to DLUHC.

This data is published for transparency and can be found here:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/statistical-data-sets/live-tables-on-homelessness>

A number of national and regional comparisons can be drawn from this data.

7.12 Using 2021/22 data the Council can compare the total number of people per 100,000 presenting as homeless at a local, and national level:

	Homeless applications (per 100,000 people)
England	6.06
Blackpool	12.78

This shows the significant additional pressure on Blackpool homeless services compared to other parts of the country, driven by transience, complex needs and poor housing.

7.13 It is also worth noting that in terms of identified support needs for homeless people, the England average for people with one of more support needs is 51.7%, **whereas in Blackpool this is 83.2%**

7.14 Despite these disproportionate pressures on Blackpool services, in terms of performance and outcomes these tables show that a number of indicators for Blackpool are actually more positive than national averages.

For those who are homeless (relief duty) the England average for **people securing accommodation** for 6 months or more (a positive outcome) is 39%, whereas in **Blackpool this is 55%**

Similarly for those at risk of homelessness (prevention duty) the England average **for those securing, or retaining existing accommodation**, with support from the Council, is 56%, and the Blackpool **average 60%**.

7.15 However for those who retain their existing accommodation (as oppose to securing new accommodation) the England average is 33%, and the Blackpool average 25%, again highlighting the challenges in Blackpool caused by transience and high levels of "sofa surfing".

7.16 **Local data and pressures**

The service remains under considerable pressure as a result of continued increase in demand. Some of this is an ongoing consequence of the impact of the pandemic, most notably the end of the eviction ban and increase in house prices/rents, which has caused a significant increase in homelessness for families. The Council is also starting to see early impact from the cost of living crisis, both in people being unable to afford rent, but also in landlords needing to sell or move back into their rental properties.

7.17 Numbers in Temporary Accommodation at time of writing are 103. This is an increase from 80 at time of last report, and reflects the increase in homeless presentations from families.

7.18 However numbers of rough sleepers are current lower than this time last year with approximately 6 people estimated to be rough sleeping on any given night, down from 14.

7.19 Blackpool also has a number of local PI's contained within the Homelessness Strategy. There are no national comparators for these, but these are further indicators that Blackpool is performing well, despite the significant pressures outlined above, and also having regard for the increased complexity of the clients Housing Services works with and general backdrop of transience and deprivation.

- 90% of clients receiving tenancy support maintain a tenancy for 12 months or more
- Only 11% of clients re-present to the service with a 12 month period
- Average length of time spent in temporary accommodation is only 35 days

7.20 Average case-loads have peaked however at 55 in some parts of the service, and this is putting considerable strain on the workforce.

7.21 **Visit from Homelessness Advice and Support Team (DLUCH)**

In summer this year Blackpool hosted a visit from our named advisors in respect of homelessness and rough sleeping. The role of the advisors is to provide an independent review of performance, and to provide both support and challenge to Local Authorities. A summary of the visit is inserted below:

Blackpool are managing a higher than average demand on the homelessness and housing options service (as measured through duties owed per 1000 households) and within this have particular challenges from homeless singles, with a high flow of individuals who are new to the streets, a significant proportion of which are from out of area, and a complex cohort of more entrenched rough sleepers and those who regularly return to the streets. Across all those approaching as homeless or threatened with homelessness recorded support needs are significantly higher than the regional and national averages, meaning that most of those accepted under a prevention or relief duty require more intensive support to find and sustain accommodation.

With a significant number of HMO's and a larger, poor quality PRS with regular churn, people are generally able to access accommodation options across the Borough but the issue is with the quality of the accommodation and support and the lack of tenancy sustainment. The availability of cheaper PRS and supported options is driving demand, particularly from out of area placements, which then puts pressure on local services when placements / tenancies break down.

Despite these challenges the Council has a strong strategic oversight of the services and partnerships in place to prevent and respond to homelessness and rough sleeping with well-developed operational pathways and robust partnership arrangements. A high proportion of accommodation outcomes are secured at prevention and relief duty end and, where targeted support is put in place, there are positive outcomes with individuals sustaining their tenancies and contributing to a relatively low level of repeat homelessness. The service is pro-active at responding to need and developing alternative accommodation and support options and is successful in working with the Council's ALMO (BCH), My Blackpool Home, RP's and other providers of accommodation and support to bring forward new supply and services to meet need. A pathway is also in place to provide robust oversight of the supported housing sector with work through the Supported Housing Improvement Programme Pilot focused on improving the quality and standards of accommodation and support.

7.22 **Homelessness – areas of activity and funding**

7.23 **Severe Weather Emergency Protocol (SWEP)**

Details of the this year's SWEP provision are still being finalised, but the intention is to once again have an "extended SWEP" offer for known rough sleepers. This means that once weather conditions hit the threshold, SWEP will be stood up and will remain in place until the end of March.

7.24 **Alternative Giving**

The Alternative Giving campaign has been redesigned and relaunched. The initial launch has predominantly been through social media and some free publications (i.e Your Blackpool) but the Board are currently exploring opportunities for a more visible campaign. Limited funds have been raised, but it should be noted that the campaign is more about public awareness raising than fund raising.

7.25 **Funding**

The Housing Options service continues to rely heavily on time limited grant funding, but government have now made a 3 year settlement in respect of the 2 main grants.

- Homelessness Prevention Grant
- Rough Sleeping Initiative

This provides some degree of financial certainty until 2025

8.0 List of appendices:

8.1 None.

9.0 Financial considerations:

9.1 Financial considerations are outlined at section 7.27 of the report.

10.0 Legal considerations:

10.1 None

11.0 Risk management considerations:

11.1 None

12.0 Equalities considerations:

12.1 The relevant strategies have been through equalities impact assessments

13.0 Sustainability, climate change and environmental considerations:

13.1 Please see section 7.1 of the report

14.0 Internal/external consultation undertaken:

14.1 None.

15.0 Background papers:

15.1 None.