

## Environment & Place Overview & Scrutiny Budget Working Group Conclusions – Part 2, housing related enquiries

---

### Key Lines of Enquiry

The Working Group undertook a deep dive into the housing temporary accommodation budget, raising detailed data and information requests. These are detailed in the Key Lines of Enquiry (KLOE) background document (available upon request).

Working Group Findings and Recommendations	
Question for consideration	Working group conclusions
How much is in the budget?	<p>The group undertook a deep dive into the temporary accommodation budget. This included grant and benefit funding. Councillors were concerned to note that the increase in MHCLG Homelessness Prevention Grant (HPG) annual allocation was not in line with the increasing service pressures and that the reserve balance was forecast to be utilised by the end of 2026/27.</p> <p>The group was also concerned that the Housing Service had to bear a significant cost of temporary accommodation placements as the subsidy that can be claimed through housing benefit is insufficient for the total cost (currently, per placement per week, £126 is met by subsidy compared to between £566 and £1131 met by the council).</p>
What does the data tell us about demand or unmet needs?	<p>The group noted that whilst the levels of homelessness and housing need have continued to rise nationally and locally, there had been a large increase in the number of council provided temporary accommodation options and a reduction in the number of families in unsuitable emergency accommodation. Whilst homelessness applications had increased by 13%, the housing team had prioritised prevention work and there was a resulting 12% reduction in the use of temporary accommodation in 2024 compared to 2023, and a 35% reduction in the use of bed and breakfast accommodation in 2024 compared to 2023. Overall, the number of new households experiencing homelessness was reducing.</p>
Is the council meeting its aims and objectives?	<p>The group was assured that, within the difficult political and financial position that the council is in, officers had explored options to maximise budget and changed the direction of travel in relation to temporary accommodation.</p>

	<p>The group scrutinised work relating to temporary accommodation unit acquisitions and noted that circa 90 units had been acquired of a 130 unit programme by the council over the last two-year period, in a significant one-off acquisition programme in response to increased use of emergency accommodation (B&amp;B). Coupled with targeted work around prevention, the programme was proving effective in terms of reducing the number of people in bed and breakfast accommodation, but there had been issues with upscaling the workforce to meet the works required before letting. Responsibility for this sits across more than one directorate (Housing Delivery/ Property/ Housing and Communities) which added another level of complexity. The group noted that officers were now applying significant resource to monitoring this programme and filling units as soon as possible. The group was assured that this is now being effectively monitored by officers to realise bed and breakfast budget savings as soon as possible. The group noted that five 'Temporary Accommodation Efficiency Review Themes' had been identified to further improve the efficiency of the service and the group was confident that these themes would continue to be explored through the refreshed Housing Strategy work currently in progress.</p>
<p>Do we have any recommendations?</p>	<p><b><u>Recommendations to the O&amp;S Board:</u></b></p> <p><b>That the Board recommend to Cabinet:</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li><b>1. That Cabinet notes that the O&amp;S working group members are assured that, within the difficult political and financial position that the council is in, officers have explored options to maximise budget and to change the direction of travel in relation to temporary accommodation.</b></li> <li><b>2. That the O&amp;S working group members record their concern at the level of Homelessness Prevention Grant and the government subsidy for temporary accommodation placements and request that the Portfolio Holder for Housing &amp; Regulatory Services explore all possible mechanisms to lobby government for increases in this respect.</b></li> <li><b>3. That, to support work around the Temporary Accommodation Efficiency Review Themes, Officers be asked to explore the benefits of using co-production tools to answer difficult policy questions, such as the approach to be taken to releasing empty homes. The working group suggested that one such tool may be a Citizens Assembly or Citizens Survey.</b></li> </ol>

	<p><b>That the Board recommends to the Environment &amp; Place O&amp;S Committee:</b></p> <p><b>4. That the committee note that officers plan to develop a Temporary Accommodation Strategy and that the committee add this to its work plan to provide O&amp;S engagement in the strategy at the appropriate time.</b></p>
--	---