

Information/Discussion Paper

Social and Community Overview and Scrutiny Committee - 11th April 2005

Reviewing Standards of Bed & Breakfast Accommodation

This note contains the information to keep Members informed of matters relating to the work of the Committee, but where no decisions from Members are needed

1. Why has this come to scrutiny?

- 1.1 It was agreed in December 2003 that as part of the Council's Work Programme it should complete a review of the use of Bed & Breakfast (B&B) accommodation for homeless households, with the aim of improving the overall standard of B&B accommodation used for these households.

2. Summary of the Issue and Recommendation

- 2.1 Following the publication of a Consultation Paper by the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister (ODPM) entitled, 'Improving Standards of Accommodation for Homeless Households Placed in Temporary Accommodation', which focuses on the suitability of temporary accommodation, and in particular B&B accommodation, it is recommended that the Council adopts these proposed minimum standards when reviewing its use of B&B accommodation for homeless households.

3. Background

- 3.1 The ODPM published its Consultation Paper in May 2003. This Paper provides a detailed list of minimum standards which they propose Local Authorities should have regard to before a homeless household is placed into B&B accommodation.
- 3.2 Whilst the government have not yet formally asked Local Authorities to adopt these minimum standards, it is recommended that the Council does adopt them in their current form, given that they are sufficiently detailed enough to provide a comprehensive assessment on the suitability of B&B accommodation used for homeless households.

4. Summary of Information

- 4.1 Since April 2004 the use of B&B accommodation for households accepted as homeless has been kept to a minimum. Over the past 12 months, an average of 7 placements was made each month. This compares with an average of 11 placements

each month during the previous year. In particular, considerable progress has been made in reducing the use of B&B accommodation for homeless families. The target for 2004/05 was for families placed in B&B to remain there for no more than 6 weeks. To date, the average length of stay is just 12 days. Furthermore, in the past 5 months no families have been placed in B&B accommodation.

- 4.2 The success in minimising the use of B&B accommodation has come about largely through giving greater priority on the housing list to those households accepted as homeless. This has led to 85% of all homeless acceptances being resolved within the first 6 months, with the remaining 15% resolved in the following 6 months.
- 4.3 Particular success has been brought about by increasing the number of Furnished Accommodation units. This is emergency housing which is used as an alternative to B&B accommodation for homeless families. There are currently 20 units of Furnished Accommodation, and turnover is kept high by giving greater priority to these households on the housing list.
- 4.4 Not all those that the Council accepts as homeless are housed directly into temporary accommodation provided by the Council. In approximately 40% of cases the Council is able to negotiate with the homeless household and their families for them to remain in the family home, or in alternative accommodation, temporarily, until a more settled housing solution is found. A further 25% are housed directly into permanent accommodation, without the need for temporary housing. However, approximately 30% of households do rely on the use of temporary accommodation, and this is provided from the Council's existing housing stock. (Currently 108 dwellings are provided in this way for homeless households, of which 65 dwellings accommodate homeless families).
- 4.5 With the demand from households being accepted as homeless remaining high (it is anticipated that there will be 292 homeless acceptances over the period April 04-March 05, compared with 297 acceptances on the previous year), much still needs to be done to alleviate the causes of homelessness. The Council anticipates that the updated Homelessness Strategy 2005/06 will enable some headway to be made in achieving this, in particular through homeless prevention initiatives and improving access into the private rented sector for families wishing to consider this option, but who are otherwise financially prohibited from doing so.
- 4.6 By reducing homelessness, the Council will be able to minimise even further the use of B&B accommodation. B&Bs will, however, still be needed for emergency placements. It is therefore important that when the Council considers placing households in B&B accommodation, that the standard of this accommodation has been properly assessed, and that those B&Bs not meeting these standards are avoided in favour of those providing better quality accommodation. There are currently up to 10 B&Bs on the Council's list that it can use for homeless households. Whilst the majority of placements are made in Cheltenham, only 2 B&Bs are situated here. The remaining B&Bs are situated mainly in Gloucester.
- 4.7 The Council therefore proposes to review its use of B&B accommodation for homeless households by using a 'Bed & Breakfast Inspection Schedule' (see Appendix A). This Schedule will enable visiting officers to consider all the minimum standards listed in the Consultation Paper.
- 4.8 The minimum standards highlighted in the Consultation Paper cover four main areas:
 - The size and occupancy levels of rooms, and suitability and/or availability of heating

facilities.

- The storage, preparation and cooking of food, and the disposal of waste water. Particular attention will be given to the suitability and/or availability of these facilities, along with the number of residents using them.
- Toilet and personal washing facilities. Again, focus will be on the suitability and/or availability of these facilities, along with the number of residents sharing these facilities.
- The overall standard of management of the B&B establishment, including whether there are clear emergency evacuation procedures, the ease with which Officers can gain access to the premises to carry out inspections, and whether there are procedures in place to deal with any complaints relating to harassment on racial, sexual or other discriminating grounds by other residents. Where there is a breach of these standards, the Council will notify the manager of this, giving him/her reasonable time (2 months) to rectify the breach.

4.9 Guidance notes entitled, 'Guidance Notes when using the Inspection Schedule' (Appendix B), will provide more detailed information on what needs to be considered in order to determine whether the minimum standards have been met.

4.10 Guidance will also be given on how to grade the B&Bs by detailing when a B&B should be rated 'poor', 'satisfactory' or 'good' in each of the four areas listed in paragraph 4.2 of this report. (See Appendix C entitled, 'Grading of Bed & Breakfasts')

4.11 At the end of the Inspection Schedule the visiting officer can point and then grade the B&B. 0 points will be awarded where there has been a 'poor' rating in each of the areas being assessed, 5 points for every 'satisfactory' rating assessed, and 10 points for every 'good' rating. The scores will then be added up, with the B&B being awarded a grade from A to D.

4.12 Grade A will be awarded to those B&Bs that are deemed to provide accommodation to a high standard, having gained between 31 and 40 points. Grade A premises will be considered first for availability when a homeless placement is required. Grade B, will be given to those providing a satisfactory standard of accommodation, gaining between 20 and 30 points. Grade C premises will be deemed suitable only for short-term placements (no more than six weeks) where between 10 and 19 points have been awarded. Grade D premises will have scored less than 10 points, and should not be used for homeless households. Any households currently occupying grade D premises will be relocated to alternative accommodation as quickly as possible.

4.13 A formal inspection of the B&Bs will be carried out least once a year. However, Officers will also visit the residents they have placed in the B&Bs, to check on the facilities that have been made available to them, and to ensure that the overall standard of management continues to remain in accordance with the findings of the initial inspection.

4.14 These inspections will be carried out by the Homelessness and Allocations Team, and will supplement the work carried out by Environmental Health Officers, who will continue to ensure that these B&Bs meet the required health and safety standards.

Background Papers

Improving Standards of Accommodation for Homeless Households Placed in Temporary Accommodation – A Consultation Paper by the ODPM

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Accountability

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Scrutiny Function

Social and Community overview and scrutiny committee