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## Report to West Sussex Health and Wellbeing Board

**Date** 25 April 2024

**Report title** West Sussex Strategic Housing Group Update

**Report by** Ian Duke, Chief Executive Crawley Borough Council  
and Chair of the West Sussex Strategic Housing Group

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### Summary

This is an update report from the West Sussex Strategic Housing Group setting out national housing pressures, county-wide responses, and potential areas for support.

### Recommendations to the Board

#### The Health and Wellbeing Board is asked to;

- (1) Note the report
  - (2) Discuss potential areas of support from Health & Wellbeing Board partners.
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### Relevance to [Joint Health and Wellbeing Strategy](#)

#### 1 Background and context

- 1.1 The West Sussex Health & Wellbeing Board (HWB) has requested an update from the West Sussex Strategy Housing Group, specifically to cover:
  - Steer on National Pressures
  - What actions the Housing Group is taking with respect to the Housing Crisis
  - What strategic priorities is the Housing Group progressing and how can the HWB partners support?
- 1.2 This paper sets out a high level briefing on the areas requested and proposes potential areas of support for further discussion at the Board.

#### 2 National Pressures

- 2.1 Over the past year, the scale of homelessness pressures upon local authorities has gained a much higher profile. Homelessness now sits alongside Adult Social Care, Children's Services, and Special Educational Needs & Disabilities

(particularly school transport) as statutory duties that threaten local government finances.

2.2 Structurally, the situation is driven by:

- The unaffordability of home ownership for an increasing number of people.
- A shrinking private rented sector with soaring rents that also makes this option for housing increasingly unaffordable.
- Shortage of council and other social housing to meet demand.

2.3 This has driven a sharp acceleration of demand post-pandemic, a trend that currently shows no sign of slowing. Nationally, between 2022 and 2023 (latest figures), there was a 13% increase in the number of households in temporary accommodation. Those households with children increased by 19%. The increase in lower tier authorities was higher again at 16.4% and 23.9% respectively.

2.4 Whilst homelessness has been an issue for many years, outside of metropolitan areas it has not been at scale. This has changed rapidly over the past few years. Between January and June 2023 (latest national figures available) 153,000 households were owed homelessness relief or prevention duty, of which 44,618 (29.1%) were owed by a lower tier authority.

2.5 Unlike larger unitary councils, lower tier authorities do not have the scale to absorb these costs. The District Council Network (DCN) undertook a survey earlier this calendar year. It found that in some cases the cost of temporary accommodation was between 20% and 50% of that Council's total net revenue budget. The DCN also found that it is not uncommon for council spending on temporary accommodation to have increased tenfold or more since 2012.

2.6 Whilst these strains are being felt widely, there are variations across places. When looking at costs as a percentage of net revenue budget, the southeast is particularly badly affected. For this reason, a network of outlier (in terms of impact) authorities across Kent and Sussex are working together to share practice and to lobby on this issue. Convened by Crawley, the other authorities are Hastings, Eastbourne-Lewes, Rother, Swale, Dartford, Adur & Worthing and Arun.

2.7 This grouping has been highly effective in shaping the national narrative. Eastbourne has taken the lead in working with the DCN to raise the profile of the scale of homelessness among lower tier authorities. It was through the Kent and Sussex authorities that developed the key asks of Government that was subsequently signed up to by 119 Councils across the country [Chancellor urged by 119 councils to avert homelessness crisis | District Councils' Network](#). Two of the authorities (Crawley and Eastbourne) have subsequently declared a housing emergency an action actively being considered by others.

2.8 Whilst the context varies across places, the experience of these authorities shows a reasonably consistent picture about the driver behind increasing costs. The increase in demand has already been spoken to above. Authorities are also finding that the cost of temporary and emergency accommodation has also increased. Where there is housing stress there is invariably competition for

accommodation pushing the marginal rate of accommodation higher. The freeze on the Housing Benefit Subsidy at 2011 Local Housing Allowance rates means that all authorities recoup less from the Government than they had previously.

- 2.9 The shortage of properties is also affecting discharges out of emergency and temporary accommodation. Whilst this has clear cost implications, more worrying is the impact it is having on households. For instance, in Crawley the average stay in temporary accommodation is now 470 days and is likely to increase.

### **3 West Sussex Strategic Housing Group (WSSHG) Response**

- 3.1 The activity of WSSHG broadly covers three areas:

#### **A. Sharing of information around strategic matters and practice**

This space provides a forum for members to discuss relevant topics to help shape future activity. As would be expected there has been input into the regional and national discussions. Agreement has been reached to develop a core set of data around homelessness so that, at a county level, there is easy sight of the pressures being faced. The group also shares information about work and best practice being undertaken by individual authorities, for example the future focus within Crawley's Local Community Network on the wellbeing needs of those in Temporary Accommodation. The WSSHG is also reaching out and making links to its East Sussex and Kent counterparts. An initial view is that there is best practice which could accelerate progress in West Sussex, but also potential areas of joint work where this might increase the impact of the work.

#### **B. Undertaking of strategic projects**

Each district and borough contribute to a small project team to take forward agreed work. Two current projects are focused on the issues of moving people out of emergency and temporary accommodation:

##### **a. Private Rented Sector**

In the short term, given wider constraints on social housing (see below), the best discharge option remains the private rented sector despite the challenges set out above. This project worked with each of the districts and boroughs to identify current practice and challenges, as well as good practice from elsewhere, and is shortly to report its findings.

##### **b. Registered Providers**

67% of social housing stock in West Sussex is owned and managed by Registered Providers (Housing Associations), and therefore not in direct control of local authorities. There is growing evidence that the current environment within social housing, plus the business models of the Registered Providers, is both preventing new units from coming forward, and crucially acting as a block to those in greatest need. This leads to the most vulnerable households spending long periods in unsuitable housing or temporary accommodation with potentially adverse effects on children within those households. It is also affecting discharge from clinical settings. This project seeks to fully understand the position, to engage with key Registered Providers and seek to address issues where these are identified.

### **C. Responding to System Demand for Housing**

There are two broad categories of demand emerging from our health and care systems. The first relates to the strategic planning of housing to meet future population needs. The second is housing pathways for those being discharged from clinical settings or leaving care. These demands are effectively competing with other potential uses for the available housing stock both current and future. Current work in relation to these demands include:

#### **a. Care Leavers Protocol**

Responding to an ask emerging from the Children's Improvement Board, this work seeks to develop a joint protocol between Children's Services and all of the districts and boroughs within West Sussex to provide housing options for young people leaving care. Significant progress has been made and final comments are currently being worked through, with none being seen as a block to arriving at a version all parties can sign off.

#### **b. Extra Care Housing**

Adults and Health Commissioning Services have finalised the market position statement for the future development of Extra Care Housing in the county. The County Council wants this work to be a partnership with key strategic partners and in particular the district & borough councils. Districts and boroughs have all fully supported this approach to the future development of Extra Care Housing. Local extra care working groups are being established with each local authority to identify assets and land sites, capital investment opportunities, development partners and joint funding bid opportunities.

- 3.2 The WSSHG is currently mapping the various points within the health and care governance structures where there is a touch point or ask regarding housing. Whilst not yet complete it presents a complex and fragmented picture, with multiple but disparate small and responsive asks coming through to individual parties. This is not sustainable or deliverable within the current context.

## **4 Potential Areas of Support from Health & Wellbeing Board Partners**

- 4.1 On 23 February 2023 a Health & Wellbeing Board Seminar was held on issues relating to Housing, Homelessness Covid & Health. This set out how the compounding issues of post-pandemic trends, cost of living, the emerging housing crisis, and the links across to health and care were creating the 'perfect storm'. It set out the complexity of the system, but also the complex needs of many of those who were homeless.
- 4.2 The key objective of the seminar was 'how can the Board collectively focus on the wider housing agenda to help improve the health and wellbeing of our residents?' The session set two specific questions:
- What actions can the Health & Wellbeing Board take to ensure partners are more collaborative in their efforts in tackling this issue in line with the Memorandum of Understanding and sustain the progress that has been made?

- Where can housing intervene earlier with the health sector? E.g. discharge quicker back home or into communities? E.g. Hotels, serviced apartments, disabled facility grants, who should be represented in these conversations and why?

There is a need to revisit the outcome of that workshop and to assess what progress has been made.

4.3 The potential areas of support for discussion are set out below, but these are not exclusive, and others may emerge from the discussion:

- Recognition from all partners of the substantial pressures within housing and the wider impact of this on wider agendas.
- Offer to bring the weight of the Health & Wellbeing Board behind influencing and campaign work targeted at improving the situation where the impacts on health and wellbeing are established.
- Support greater collaborative and longer-term planning around housing needs from the health and care sectors.
- Commitment to consider how the health and care system can better support needs within the housing sector to prevent worsening outcomes.

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