

Housing Scrutiny

**Improved service offer for families:
Homes not hostels**

25th February 2020

Assistant City Mayor: Cllr Cutkelvin

Lead director: Chris Burgin

Useful information

- Ward(s) affected: All but especially Abbey (where Border House is located)
- Report author: Caroline Carpendale
- Author contact details: caroline.carpendale@leicester.gov.uk
- Report version number: draft

1. Summary

- 1.1 Leicester's fourth Homelessness Strategy was formally agreed May 2018. Since this was formally adopted work has been ongoing to implement the agreed actions / proposals and build on the extensive work already in place.
- 1.2 This report advises members of the Housing Scrutiny Commission on plans to implement the changes agreed as part of the homelessness strategy; a new service offer for homeless families.

2. Supporting information

Proposals from the Homelessness Strategy

- 2.1 As part of the homelessness strategy the proposals made regarding homeless families were:
 - For families who are facing homelessness, we will work to accommodate them in independent accommodation and only use temporary accommodation when they require additional support.
 - All temporary accommodation for families commissioned by the council will be self-contained.
 - We will support children's services to provide suitable accommodation when parenting assessments are required.

Current emergency accommodation for families (Border House Hostel)

- 2.2 This hostel was initially opened in 1970 and has been extended since. There are 26 bed rooms across 10 houses / flats on the main site. There are also 17 2-bed flats on Bridlespur Way. At the main hostel site, the living space available to families whilst they are accommodated is limited and families can share kitchen, lounge and bathroom facilities with other families. They also share use of free launderette facilities with other families and there is very little room to store personal belongings. This type and layout of accommodation leads it to feel very institutional.
- 2.3 The council's service analysis team looked at the services provided by the family support service and of the Border House Hostel reported (June 2018) *"The accommodation is basic and there is a lack of storage for possessions. Sharing with another family is destabilising and can feel threatening as there is minimal control over the space that service user's children are living within."*

- 2.4 There was also a recent fire service audit that identified a number of improvements required. All improvements have been made to ensure the safety of residents staying at Border House hostel, however to make this building fit for purpose for the future would require significant investment. Whilst we have worked to keep Border House up to a satisfactory standard and make improvements the structure and layout of this building it is not conducive with the aims and objectives to provide homeless families with self-contained accommodation.
- 2.5 National research ('This is no place for a child' The experience of homeless families in emergency accommodation. Shelter November 2015) found:
- Families do not have the space to live their lives – to play, study, or relax. Nor a place of safety where they can grow and develop.
 - Disruption to their family routines (travel to work / school / support networks)
 - Impact on children's and parents mental and physical health and child development
 - Impact on school and education
- 2.6 Border House currently offers families access to an on-site creche (Corner Club) and offer shared space for families to minimise impacts on families whilst staying in the hostel. By providing families with their own self-contained properties dispersed across the city, this will minimise disruption to family life. They will be able to more easily maintain access to their existing schools, GPs, childcare services etc. Families placed in temporary accommodation homes will be provided with support to maintain and access services available in the local community.

Proposed Service Offer

- 2.7 In cases when temporary accommodation is provided, we want this to be self-contained, so this is as much like a home as possible (homes not hostels). Also, that this meets the accommodation and support needs of the family and as short a time is spent in temporary accommodation as possible whilst families are supported to find a suitable settled home.
- 2.8 The proposal will be to secure 1-3 bed accommodation either from council or other stock commissioned from provider(s). It is intended to have an initial stock of 45 dwellings and if these were all to be council stock, this would mean 0.16% of the existing housing stock would be used for temporary accommodation.
- 2.9 The properties, which will be fully furnished, will be dispersed across the city to enable consideration for households who have strong reasons to remain in a particular area for employment, education or support networks.

Support for families

- 2.10 Each family staying in self-contained temporary accommodation will receive visiting support from a new family transitions service, who will work to ensure all their support needs are addressed. The families transitions team will work

closely with other agencies to ensure the family receives the tailored support needed to meet the needs of each family member, making resettlement more achievable and providing a more stable future for the children and the entire family unit.

2.11 This service would be able to provide support to families to:

- set up and maintain a home
- maintain children's access to education and health care
- manage safety and security of their accommodation
- maintain their health and wellbeing
- develop their life skills, such as cooking, cleaning and budgeting skills
- apply for benefits
- signposting to education, training and employment support services
- signposting and support to access childcare and children's support services
- access other services
- get advice and advocacy in connection with housing or tenancy matters

2.12 The families transitions team won't provide:

- counselling
- childcare
- parenting support

However, the team will signpost and support families to access these services in the community. We will work closely with adults & children's social care services to ensure parents and children are able to continue to or access support in the local community, including local children centres. This will help to ensure that children and families are supported in their local communities, reducing disruption to children and their parents.

How will this be done?

2.13 As of January there were 73 homeless families accommodated at the council operated Border House main site and Bridlespur Way and through paid nightly self-contained temporary accommodation.

2.14 There will be a transition period to move from the existing temporary accommodation provided at Border House. This will be done through a phased approach.

- Phase 1. LCC temporary accommodation will no longer be shared between families. At this point there will be a total of 68 properties available.
- Phase 2a. As each homeless family moves on from Border House (main-site) hostel this will no longer be used, and the Corner Club will close. This decision will only be taken when suitable alternative accommodation and support is available for each family. At this point there will be a total of 58 properties available at Bridlespur Way and through paid nightly temporary accommodation.

Phase 2b. On-going commissioning of 45 properties of 1-3 bed.

Phase 3. Continuous monitoring and reviewing ways to achieve higher levels of prevention and higher move-on rates from temporary accommodation with the aim of minimising the use of temporary accommodation.

- 2.15 The numbers of families requiring temporary accommodation throughout this period will be closely monitored so appropriate action can be taken to manage demand and supply and the impacts of the decommissioning and commissioning plan will be carefully monitored and gradually implemented to ensure that it does not negatively impact upon families who are homeless.

Staffing implications

- 2.16 These changes will require changes in staffing who support the Border House hostel & Corner Club (currently established 26 staff / 20.2 FTE). It is likely that a reduced number of staff will be required to support the future model of temporary accommodation and support.
- 2.17 During the first stage in decommissioning reductions in staff will come from deleting 3 vacancies. This would leave 23 staff / 17.2 FTE.
- 2.18 Many hostel staff work at both the family and singles temporary accommodation. To deliver improved services to single people and couples who are homeless additional staffing may be required. Existing staff will be utilised to minimise any potential redundancies. Vacancies across the service will be ringfenced for any staff affected by this proposal.
- 2.19 There will also be the new visiting support service for families in temporary accommodation. This also would mitigate any potential redundancies.
- 2.20 Consultation with staff and trade unions will take place in line with the council's organisational review policy.

3. Details of Scrutiny

- 3.1 As part of the homelessness review & strategy consultation a full consultation exercise was undertaken asking for feedback on the draft strategy, including proposals. There was a public consultation questionnaire on the Council's webpages and this was promoted to groups / individuals with an interest in homelessness.
- 3.2 A special Homelessness Reference Group, which was a partnership group of any stakeholders providing services for homeless people in the city, was held to discuss the proposed strategy and proposals.
- 3.3 The homelessness review & strategy was shared with the Housing Scrutiny Commission for their feedback and they have been provided with two update reports on delivery of the strategy since it's adoption.

- 3.4 The use of temporary accommodation for families and the type of accommodation used has been researched looking at best practice guidance and comparator information from similar size authorities.
- 3.5 Based upon analysis of families accessing temporary accommodation there are very few families that require a high level of support in an accommodation-based service. Support will be assessed upon an individual basis and there will still be a provision of properties to meet the needs of crisis presentations and those who require more intensive housing related support.
- 3.6 Scrutiny are asked for their feedback for the improved service offer for families.