

COMMENTS FROM OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY PANEL (PERFORMANCE AND GROWTH)

HOMELESSNESS REVIEW AND STRATEGY

- 3.1 The Panel received the Homelessness Review and Strategy at its meeting on 6th February 2020.
- 3.2 Concern was expressed that the rough sleeping survey has failed to capture the true number of rough sleepers in Huntingdonshire. However, the Panel was informed that the survey is a multiagency survey which aims to capture a snapshot of rough sleepers in Huntingdonshire on a specified night. Members were assured that the Council are aware of the individuals who rough sleep, but engagement is challenging as some individuals choose to sleep rough.
- 3.3 A question was raised by Councillor Mrs Smith regarding sofa surfers and how the Council identifies them. Members were informed that sofa surfers would not be included in the estimates as they are not sleeping rough. However, if they require housing advice about their options, they would have to self-identify themselves to the Council. The Panel was advised that many people with insecure accommodation such as sofa surfers do apply to the housing register and their needs are assessed. They are also advised about their options.
- 3.4 The Panel discussed the Council's engagement with further education in this area. It was noted that further education has not historically engaged in homelessness or provided information on students that may be sofa surfing. The workstreams included in the Strategy could include engagement with further education to determine what information they hold.
- 3.5 The status of homeless EU nationals was raised now the United Kingdom has left the EU. The Panel was informed that currently things remain as they were but that in time a new immigration system will be adopted by the Government and this will determine the course of action for homeless EU nationals. Those EU nationals currently in the UK can apply for settled status if they wish to continue living in the country and they should be encouraged to do this through the Home Office's on-line scheme.
- 3.6 Councillor Giles asked if it was more prudent for the Council to buy a hostel to reduce costs. In response, Members were informed that it is the Council's aim to move away from using hostels with shared facilities and instead self-contained short-term units of accommodation are being provided as an alternative. In addition, in terms of owning a hostel, there are practicalities associated with moving individuals and families out of their communities and having the additional challenges of getting to work or taking children to school. The Panel were also informed that the net cost of homelessness includes costs that cannot be recovered from Government. The Council pays Housing Benefit to households in temporary accommodation but, owing to regulations, not all of this can be reclaimed from the Government. This would be the case

irrespective of who owns the accommodation and so establishing Council owned accommodation would not reduce these costs.

- 3.7 Councillor Morris raised concern in relation to long term empty Ministry of Defence properties at Brampton, Wyton and Alconbury. He asked if the Council could engage in order to obtain some of the properties for the Council's housing requirements. In response, Members were informed that the Council has previously engaged with the Ministry of Defence on this matter, but they were unwilling to release the properties as they might be required if operational requirements change.
- 3.8 In summary, the view of the Panel was that the review and strategy is comprehensive and good piece of work. Members suggest the Cabinet should approve the recommendations contained in the report.