



CHILDREN AND LEARNING OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY SUB-COMMITTEE, 14 FEBRUARY 2019

Subject Heading:	Private Sector Leasing (PSL) and children.
SLT Lead:	Gerri Scott, Interim Director of Housing
Report Author and contact details:	Gerri Scott, Interim Director of Housing 01708 431991 Gerri.Scott@havering.gov.uk
Policy context:	The policy context is associated with the Council's statutory duties associated with homelessness.
Financial summary:	This report is for information purposes only.

The subject matter of this report deals with the following Council Objectives

Communities making Havering	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Places making Havering	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Opportunities making Havering	<input type="checkbox"/>
Connections making Havering	<input type="checkbox"/>

SUMMARY

Following the review of the housing and support needs of residents in Private Sector Leased accommodation (PSL), a detailed report on the outcome of this review will be reported to Cabinet.

The purpose of this report is to provide the committee with information on the housing and support needs of households living in Private Sector Leased accommodation (PSL) where there are children.

The headlines of the review in relation to children are:

- At present, there are no safeguarding concerns identified.
- There is more clarity on the number of households with dependent children in PSL accommodation.
- Families in smaller and larger sized accommodation were identified and the Council will look for appropriate housing solutions for them in the future.

RECOMMENDATIONS

That the committee note the report

REPORT DETAIL

1. Background

- 1.1. In October 2004, the Council introduced a Private Sector Leasing Scheme (PSL) whereby the Council leases properties from private sector landlords as temporary accommodation for households in housing need. PSL has been the major source of temporary accommodation (TA) used by Havering Council.
- 1.2. Changes in central government policy in 2010 and 2011 eroded the margin between the rental income levels and payments to owners. This is because a cap was imposed on the maximum amount of housing benefit that the Council can claim back for the cost of temporary accommodation. The amount has been set across the country for 1- 4 bedroom properties at 90% of Local Housing Allowance (LHA) as of January 2011. In addition, Councils were previously allowed to claim an additional £40pw for properties within London and £60pw for properties outside London, to cover the management costs of the accommodation. This was also removed from 1st April 2017 and replaced by a flexible homeless support grant which is paid yearly (subject to review this year).
- 1.3. Since 2010, LHA has been frozen meaning that as local market rents rise, the LHA is not keeping up. As rents have increased in the private rented sector and in order to maintain the required level of temporary accommodation supply, the Council has had to increase payments to landlords, thereby creating a budget pressure.

- 1.4. This is not just a Havering issue and pressures are being seen at national and regional level. Affordability of housing supply is becoming more of a challenge locally. However this is not just about housing numbers, but the effect on people and families. The journey into stable, affordable housing has changed and the uncertain future for families creates a pressure on support networks.
- 1.5. The Homeless Placements policy, approved in June 2016, describes the Council's approach for homeless prevention and where necessary, placements into interim and long-term temporary accommodation and then settled private rented sector accommodation.
- 1.6. Since April 2018, with the introduction of the Homelessness Reduction Act, there is an additional focus on prevention as the Council can work with households much earlier on preventing homelessness, by seeking alternative private rented accommodation before the resident becomes homeless. This means that there has been a shift away from temporary accommodation to private rented accommodation in the general market. The evidence to date shows that the service has had significant successes in this new approach but it is too early to assume that demand will be less going forward.
- 1.7. With increasing demand on the homelessness service and with a view to understanding the housing and support needs of those in PSL accommodation to whom the Council has not yet accepted a duty (non-statutory homeless), in July 2018, officers sought to commence a review of these households. Following concerns raised by residents, this was paused.
- 1.8. Moreover, a commitment was then given to all PSL residents by the Leader in his letter dated 17th July 2018 that a review of their housing and support needs would be undertaken before any further action is taken. At the All Member briefing on 15th August 2018, the approach and timescale of the review was confirmed. A letter was sent to all PSL residents on 10th September 2018 setting out the next step of the review and the timescales. A copy of the letter was shared with all ward members in advance.
- 1.9. The principles of the review were:
 - To help find the right stable, sustainable, housing solution for people living in temporary accommodation
 - To determine housing need where a duty has been established

- To ensure details are up to date so residents have the right banding regarding access to affordable housing
- To work with families and agencies to help ease pressures associated with key aspects affecting their housing choices
- To identify housing solutions options and work with families to secure them.

1.10. The review has been carried out in 4 substantial areas:

- A desktop review which has collated the data held in systems and files on the circumstances currently known about our residents
- Face to face meetings between an officer and each family or person to ensure that we understand everything about them and their housing situation
- Detailed and considered assessments and open dialogue looking at what type of solution is available
- Working towards stable housing provision and sustainable housing options

2. Children in Private Sector Leased (PSL) accommodation

2.1. There are 630 (71%) households with dependent children in PSL accommodation and a total of 1,171 children. The majority (76%) of the households with dependent children are lone female parent households, followed by 23% of two parent households as shown in table 1.

Table 1: Breakdown of number of children by household type

Household Type	Total households	Total Children
Lone female parent	482 (76%)	864
Couple with children	142 (23%)	298
Lone male parent	6 (1%)	9
Sub-total	630	1171
Single female	100	0
Single male	96	0
Lone female with adult children	34	0
Couple with no children	12	0
Couple with adult children	8	0
Adult brothers	1	0
Sub-total	251	0
Total	881	1171

2.2. The remaining 251 (29%) of the total PSL households are made up of single residents or families with adult children.

- 2.3. A further breakdown of the number of children in each household is provided in table 2 and shows that the largest number of households (79%) contains 1 or 2 children (495/630) which is consistent with the fact that 68% (606/887) of the PSL portfolio are two and three bedroom properties.

Table 2: Number of children

Number of children per household	Number of households	%
1	276 (44%)	79%
2	219 (35%)	
3	92 (15%)	
4	37 (6%)	
5+	6	
Total	630	

- 2.4. Of the total 1,171 children living in PSL accommodation, 216 (18%) are in accommodation that is too small for the family by either one or two extra bedrooms. It affects 86 residents and details are provided in table 3.

Table 3: Breakdown of overcrowded households and their accommodation need

Bedroom need	Number of households
In 1 bed and need 2 bed	48
In 1 bed and need 3 bed	3
In 2 bed and need 3 bed	27
In 2 bed and need 4 bed	1
In 3 bed and need 4 bed	11
In 3 bed and need 5 bed	1
Total	86

- 2.5. Of the total 1,171 children living in PSL accommodation, 31 (3%) are in accommodation that is too large for the family by at least one extra bedroom. As they are under-occupying the accommodation, it is likely that they will only receive the level of housing benefit for the size of property they need, leading to financial difficulties. Details are provided in table 4.

Table 4: Breakdown of under-occupying households and their accommodation need

Bedroom need	Number of households
In 3 bed and need 2 bed	10
In 4 bed and need 3 bed	5
Total	15

- 2.6. For the 101 households who are either overcrowded or under-occupying the properties, the Council will look for appropriate housing solutions for them in the future.
- 2.7. There are also 41 (6%) households with dependent children at key stages of their education (GSCE/A-Levels) and their housing stability is essential.

3. Working with Children's Services to support families

- 3.1. Housing and Children's Services work together to address the housing and support needs of families in order to safeguard and promote the welfare of children and young people.
- 3.2. There is an ongoing focus on reducing the need for temporary accommodation for families by working with those at risk earlier and preventing them from becoming homeless. Where this is not possible and they are placed in temporary accommodation, every effort is made to ensure they have continuity of access to mainstream services like schools in order to minimise disruption to the children.
- 3.3. Families with identified support need are given support and advice by the Council. Where additional support is needed, a referral is made to Peabody Floating Support service so that they can be given emotional and practical help to manage their tenancies.
- 3.4. Case conferences are used when a family needs multi-agency intervention.

IMPLICATIONS AND RISKS

Financial implications and risks:

There are no financial implications in this report. The content is for information purposes only. However, a detailed report on the outcome of this review will be presented to Cabinet, including any financial implications identified.

Legal implications and risks:

The Council has various duties in relation to homeless households and in respect of child protection/safeguarding and these are engaged in relation to the matters covered by the Report. However, there are no apparent legal implications in noting the outcome of the review.

Human Resources implications and risks:

There are no HR implications as a result of the review

Equalities implications and risks:

There are no equalities implications as a result of the review. This report focuses on the outcome of the review of the housing and support need of existing PSL residents and children, in line with existing policies.