

Housing Board Supplementary Terms of Reference during Covid-19 crisis

Background

During 'business as usual' the Housing Board is the key strategic partnership forum to deliver priorities relating to new homes, homes for wellbeing, existing homes and housing need. As stated in the 'business as usual' Terms of Reference:

The Housing Board is a senior officer group of local authorities, housing providers and partner agencies which works collaboratively on strategic and operational housing issues.

(It) is an officer group, whose function is to co-ordinate and take forward strategic housing projects and ways of working. It is not a formally constituted decision-making body, so it acts with reference to existing decision making processes particularly local authority constitutional arrangements and other organisational processes.

Following the announcement by the Government of the need for Rough Sleeper Cells to help manage Covid-19, membership of the Housing Board has been broadened to ensure all strategic housing and Covid-19 issues are covered, especially rough sleepers.

This will enable joint planning with partners for housing issues related to Covid-19, alongside operational responses and learning to be shared across the Housing Board area, both at Board meetings and through the network or related groups.

The Board remains a strategic level group, focused on identifying shared challenges and partnership solutions. During Covid-19 there will be a huge amount of work needed at granular level to secure accommodation for rough sleepers & others and to formulate individual housing plans. This work will be led by the districts who will work closely in partnership with housing and support providers, the police, street outreach teams, accommodation providers, the community and voluntary sector, the health service, GPs etc. The Housing Board will look to draw lessons and share good practice coming out of this detailed level work wherever possible, and to use this learning and seek input from all partners to plan for the future, post-lockdown (aka recovery planning).

Objectives

- Work with relevant partners to plan for provision and management of rough sleeper accommodation across the area; services needed to support that accommodation including health, social and on-line; management and release as and when the lockdown is removed to minimize further infection.
- Oversight of temporary and supported housing sectors to help recognise, monitor and support solutions for any identified issues.

- Mobilise and co-ordinate community resources to support the future housing plans for rough sleepers, including securing pathways into suitable accommodation, finance and benefit support, treatment for substance misuse, housing support and health and wellbeing support, in accordance with individual need.
- Identify and review risks to the delivery of this work and take action to reduce risk, whilst escalating higher level concerns through the appropriate mechanisms for strategic support. To respond to risks identified by the Excluded Groups Co-ordination & Oversight Group and report in to the Community Reference Group.
- Capture good practice during the Covid-19 crisis period with a view to informing future partnership working on strategic housing and specifically rough sleepers.

Escalation mechanisms

The group retains links to the Public Service Board and to its sub-groups and related groups as listed in our regular terms of reference. In addition the Housing Board will take summary reports incorporate highlights of issues from

- Sub-regional homelessness strategy group (meets fortnightly)
- The MAIC stats provided by districts to the Multi Agency Incident Cell at PCC on people in various temporary accommodation.
- Weekly forums run by Cambridgeshire County Council (Lisa Sparks) with Registered Providers who deliver housing related support services.
- Other ad-hoc forums and information gathering exercises (for example in relation to other excluded groups).

During this period the group will feed into Local Resilience Forum (LRF) Structures, including the Strategic Coordination Group (SCG) and the Community Reference Group (CRG), via the Excluded Groups Co-ordination & Oversight Group. The later identified and RAG rates risks for rough sleepers and homelessness issues, which are reviewed weekly. A family tree of groups is available at www.cambridgeshireinsight.org.uk/housingboard.

Individual organisations may also be involved in these co-ordination groups for dealing with local and topic-specific issues.

Longer term Covid-19 issues for the Housing Board

Other ways Covid-19 may link with the Housing Board's four priorities:

- New homes
 - Delays to new homes being completed and how to overcome.
 - Issues on construction sites.
 - Rush on inspections and removals post lockdown.
 - Health and safety where sites not completed.
 - Effect on building trade.
 - Effect on home sales and therefore maybe affordability in future.

- Homes for wellbeing
 - Dealing with extra care issues and staff needs.
 - Dealing with 'poorer standard' housing e.g. HMOS, hostels, migrant workers, design of homes and ability to self-isolate.
 - Dealing with hospital discharges to keep the flow of people going with minimising risks.
 - Overlap with other work on drugs and alcohol, mental health etc.
- existing homes
 - Repairs.
 - Void relets.
 - Furnishings and hardship.
 - Helping people get the help they need – maybe financially (UC) to keep paying the rent / mortgage.
- housing need
 - Effect on choice based lettings schemes.
 - Encouraging continued supply of relets.
 - Predicting and planning to meet needs of rough sleepers temporarily placed in hotels etc.
 - Predicting housing need as lockdown is reduced / removed e.g. people falling into arrears.
 - Overlap with work on G&Ts, DV, and prison release.
 - Oversight of individual and collective housing plans across the area, leading into recovery, track and trace stages.

Some practical issues for the Board during Covid-19

- The Board will meet fortnightly using on-line tool e.g. MS Teams, alternate Fridays, 10.30 to 12.00am.
- For the Covid period some members of the “copy to list” are being promoted to the “invite list” and some new members may be invited to help ensure the connections are in place to tackle the various Covid-19 issues.
- All agendas and notes will go to both the main list and the cc list to increase sharing and awareness.
- After each meeting, a brief set of notes will be circulated including actions, commitments and decisions noted in table format. This will be circulated after each meeting and actions progressed and reported back on at the following Board meeting. The actions can be used to feed into CRG, excluded groups and other meetings.
- The Board will use a simple risk assessment matrix to agree the RAG rating where of issues and the effect of actions being taken.
- At this moment there is no vice chair so another member of the Board may be asked to step in and chair an online meeting if Suzanne is unable to “attend” occasionally.
- West Suffolk will continue to be a valued partner in this work, and we all look to members of the partnership to share good practice and ideas. However some of the Covid-19 work reports straight into Cambridgeshire and Peterborough’s public health structure, so some tasks may be shared with West Suffolk “for information” but the data are not required to feed into the C&P public health system (which is only Cambridgeshire and Peterborough). In this way we aim to maintain our positive links and our awareness of what our close neighbours are doing, but not impose added burdens unnecessarily.