

Report to:	Overview and Scrutiny Committee (Regeneration and Skills) Cabinet Council	Date of Meeting:	21 September 2021 7 October 2021 18 November 2021
Subject:	Housing Support Services to Vulnerable People Working Group Final Report	Wards Affected:	All
Report of:	Chief Legal and Democratic Officer		
Cabinet Portfolio	Communities and Housing		
Is this a Key Decision?	Yes	Is it included in the Forward Plan?	Yes
Exempt/Confidential	No		

Purpose/Summary

To seek formal approval of the Housing Support Services to Vulnerable People Working Group Final Report

Recommendations

That Committee, Cabinet and Council be recommended to approve that:

1. in order for elected Members to provide a local insight into the Postcode Check process, appropriate Ward Councillors views be sought as part of the Postcode Check consultation process;
2. to provide as much evidence base as possible as part of the Postcode Check process the Chief Legal and Democratic Officer be requested to write to all elected Members urging them to contact the Head of Communities as to which areas within their wards maybe suffering issues that should be taken into account, such as instances of crime, including hate crime, anti-social behaviour and any community tensions, when considering future asylum accommodation procurement;
3. in order that elected Members are aware of the strategic planning, location and distribution of Housing and Support Services for vulnerable households the Head of Communities be requested to provide 6-monthly updates to all Councillors;
4. when commissioning specific housing and support services for

vulnerable groups, the Council should continue to adopt a strategic approach that is cognisant of other such services, the capacity of wider statutory, community and voluntary services and reflects issues at a local community level within each ward as to the location of the housing element;

5. any support services that are commissioned by the Council to support vulnerable households should be tailored to the target group with specialist provision and the ability to flex up and flex down as and when required. Local, Sefton based services, often run by the Community and Voluntary sector based in our communities should always be the preferred option wherever possible. The longer-term aim of self-reliance for the service user and longer-term sustainability of the project should always be the aim with a focus on reducing demand on demand-led services; and
6. where housing and support services that are not commissioned by the Council fail then officers should use the governance structures in place to escalate issues.

An example of this is where officers have used the Liverpool City Region Officers network and the Regional Strategic Migration Partnership so that issues can be escalated by elected members to the Lead Member for the Liverpool City Region group.

Reasons for the Recommendation

The Working Group has made a number of recommendations that require approval by the Overview and Scrutiny Committee (Regeneration and Skills), Cabinet and Council.

Alternative Options Considered and Rejected

No alternative options were considered. The Overview and Scrutiny Committee (Regeneration and Skills) established the Working Group to look at the Housing Support Services to Vulnerable People and the Working Group has performed this task.

What will it cost and how will it be financed?

- (A) **Revenue Costs**
There are no financial implications arising for the Council as a direct result of this report. The implementation of recommendations that result in efficiency savings and any necessary financial investment will be the subject of separate reports.
- (B) **Capital Costs**
There are no financial implications arising for the Council as a direct result of this report. The implementation of recommendations that result in efficiency savings and any necessary financial investment will be the subject of separate reports.

Implications:

The following implications of this proposal have been considered and where there are specific implications, these are set out below:

Financial: None	
Legal: None	
Human Resources: None	
Equality	
1. No Equality Implication	<input type="checkbox"/>
2. Equality Implications identified and mitigated	<input type="checkbox"/>
3. Equality Implication identified and risk remains	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Climate Emergency Implications	
The recommendations within this report will	
Have a positive impact	No
Have a neutral impact	Yes
Have a negative impact	No
The Author has undertaken the Climate Emergency training for report authors	Yes

Contribution to the Council's Core Purpose

Protect the most vulnerable: The aim of the Working Group was to review the topic of housing support services provided to vulnerable people by non-governmental organisations and charities and their links to statutory agencies covered by the Communities and Housing portfolio. The Working Group focused on asylum seekers and refugees who are some of the most vulnerable people in Sefton's communities. A recommendation of the Working Group aims to ensure that any support services that are commissioned by the Council to support vulnerable households should be tailored to the target group with specialist provision and the ability to flex up and flex down as and when required

Facilitate confident and resilient communities: in order for elected Members to provide a local insight into the Postcode Check process, a recommendation of the Working Group is that appropriate Ward Councillors' views be sought as part of the Postcode Check consultation process. A further recommendation, to provide as much evidence base as possible as part of the Postcode Check process, is that all elected Members are contacted urging them to contact the Head of Communities as to which areas within their wards maybe suffering issues that should be taken into account, such as instances of crime, including hate crime, anti-social behaviour and any community tensions, when considering future asylum accommodation procurement; and that in order that elected Members are aware of the strategic planning, location and distribution of Housing and Support Services for vulnerable households the Head of Communities be requested to provide 6-monthly updates to all Councillors

Commission, broker and provide core services: recommendations within the Final Report relate to when commissioning specific housing and support services for vulnerable groups, the Council should continue to adopt a strategic approach that is

cognisant of other such services, the capacity of wider statutory, community and voluntary services and reflects; that any support services that are commissioned by the Council to support vulnerable households should be tailored to the target group with specialist provision and the ability to flex up and flex down as and when required. Local, Sefton based services, often run by the Community and Voluntary sector based in our communities should always be the preferred option wherever possible. The longer-term aim of self-reliance for the service user and longer-term sustainability of the project should always be the aim with a focus on reducing demand on demand-led services issues at a local community level within each ward as to the location of the housing element; and that where housing and support services that are not commissioned by the Council fail then officers should use the governance structures in place to escalate issues
Place – leadership and influencer: Information as contained in “Facilitate confident and resilient communities” section above
Drivers of change and reform: None directly associated with this report
Facilitate sustainable economic prosperity: None directly associated with this report
Greater income for social investment: None directly associated with this report
Cleaner Greener: None directly associated with this report

What consultations have taken place on the proposals and when?

The Executive Director of Corporate Resources and Customer Services (FD 6484/21) has been consulted and notes there are no direct financial implications arising from this report.

The Chief Legal and Democratic Officer (LD4685 /21) is the author of the report.

Head of Communities and the Head of Economic Growth and Housing were involved in Working Group meetings

Implementation Date for the Decision

Immediately following the Council meeting

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Background Papers:

There are no background papers available for inspection

Introduction/Background

1. The Overview and Scrutiny Committee (Regeneration and Skills) approved the establishment of a Working Group to review the topic of Housing Support Services to Vulnerable People by non-governmental organisations and charities and their links to statutory agencies covered by the Communities and Housing portfolio with the terms of reference and objectives set out below.

2. This was a wide-ranging topic and included looking at accommodation and support services provided to Asylum Seekers, Syrian Refugees, those fleeing domestic violence and vulnerable homeless households. The terms of reference and objectives of the Working Group were:
 - The collation of information on the scale and location in Sefton of supported accommodation for vulnerable people that fall under the remit of the Communities and Housing portfolio
 - How do we ensure that such services provided to vulnerable people are regulated and are being delivered in accordance with contract specification
3. Accordingly, the Working Group met on six occasions to undertake such review and its Final Report, together with associated recommendations, is attached.
4. The Working Group's methods of enquiry included analysis of current Sefton practice; desktop research into practice elsewhere; and witness interviews with officers, stakeholders, experts and other organisations
5. The Working Group's recommendations were based on the assessment of evidence gathered in the form of witness interviews with officers, statutory agencies, a selection of accommodation and support service agencies, stakeholders, experts and other relevant organisations and the acknowledgement that there was a significant range of housing and support services for vulnerable households located throughout the borough; that when the Council directly commissioned a housing and support service for vulnerable household there was consideration of the location of the housing, taking into account other services for similar groups in the area, the capacity of statutory and non-statutory services as well as local community and ward specific issues; and that there was a mature relationship between Council Officers and service providers and that issues were resolved quickly.

However, it was also found that where a service was commissioned by an organisation external to Sefton more local issues were not taken into account and as such could cause issues. Because services were not based locally and were regionally centred services it could be difficult to resolve issues quickly and this frustrated local residents and communities.

An example of this is the Postcode Checks that Serco carry out with regards to procurement of new asylum accommodation in the borough. Elected members felt they would like more involvement from a strategic oversight of the Postcode Check process and recommendations have been formulated accordingly.

6. The Overview and Scrutiny Committee (Regeneration and Skills), Cabinet and Council are requested to support the contents of the Working Group Final Report and approve the recommendations contained therein.

