

Report to:	Policy and Performance Advisory Committee
Date:	26 January 2023
Title:	Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman referral
Report of:	Tim Whelan, Director of Service Delivery
Ward(s):	All
Purpose of report:	To support the recommendation of the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman
Officer recommendation(s):	<p>(1) To note the report; and</p> <p>(2) To review the response of the Council to the Ombudsman’s recommendations and consider whether there are areas where improvements can be made, or where further scrutiny is required.</p>
Reasons for recommendations:	To fulfil a role of the Policy and Performance Advisory Committee in looking at how the Council’s services are delivered.
Contact Officer(s):	<p>Name: Nick Peeters Post title: Committee Officer, Democratic Services E-mail: nick.peeters@lewes-eastbourne.gov.uk Telephone number: 01323 415272</p>

1 Introduction

- 1.1 On the 28 November 2022, the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman (LG&SCO) provided a final decision on a complaint made against Lewes District Council (attached at appendix 1 to the report).

The Ombudsman recommended referral of the decision and the lessons learned outcomes to the Cabinet Member for Housing and the Policy and Performance Advisory Committee.

2 Background

- 2.1 The complaint to and response from the Ombudsman concerns the Council placing a person with disabilities and complex medical needs and their family in interim and temporary accommodation, following the family being served with a notice to quit from their home (which had been adapted for wheelchair use and the person’s medical needs). The person and the family were in the interim/temporary accommodation for 11 months at the point at which the Ombudsman provided its findings and decision to the Council.

2.2 The Ombudsman's role, how the complaint was considered, and the Ombudsman's findings are detailed in appendix 1 to the report. The final decision includes a list of agreed actions for the Council to implement.

The Housing Needs team (Homes First) has responded to the person, recognising and apologising for the following issues:

- Providing unsuitable interim and temporary accommodation
- Failing to review temporary accommodation in good time
- Delays in progressing the case and poor communication due to staffing changes
- Prolonged storage of belongings

2.3 The case has now been resolved. The person was offered accommodation within the Council's housing stock. The person and their family moved into a property in November 2022 following adaptations. Financial compensation has also been agreed.

2.4 The Housing Needs team is continuing with service improvements and has introduced:

- A new triage call centre with dedicated housing staff as an initial point of contact
- Changes to the internal IT system, providing better communication with customers and improving the customer journey
- A review of the Team's training needs, including implementation of a training programme

The Housing Needs team are also carrying out wider improvement work that will positively impact all homelessness presentations which includes but is not limited to:

- Developing a partnership hub to improve our links with partner services, to provide a 'person centred approach' and actively prevent homelessness from the earliest point, and to reduce the demand on the Housing Solutions team.
- Reviewed and changed our way of working to implement 2 duty teams who will be on duty taking new cases on one week, and the next week on casework. This enables the team to progress cases; to actively prevent homelessness, to complete actions on PHP's and to complete enquiries on each case.

Additionally, the Housing Accommodation team reviewed working practices to ensure suitability assessments are completed on all households requiring emergency or temporary accommodation.

An audit is underway of all new homelessness cases to Lewes District Council since the restructure. This will be presented to the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman in February 2023

3 Response of the Policy and Performance Advisory Committee

- 3.1 The Committee is asked to look at the background to the complaint and satisfy itself that the Council has responded to the recommendations from the Ombudsman and reviewed its policies and procedures, to ensure that the risk of similar incidents occurring is reduced. The Committee is also asked to suggest areas where it feels further scrutiny may be needed.

4 Financial appraisal

- 4.1 There are no direct financial implications as a result of the report.

5 Legal implications

- 5.1 There are no direct legal implications as a result of the report.

6 Risk management implications

- 6.1 There are no risk management implications as result of the report

7 Equality analysis

- 7.1 This is a case that impacted a person who is a wheelchair user, with complex medical needs and their family. The person's medical needs meant that their housing needs were quite specific and detailed. In order to support the duty around minimising disadvantage, the recommendations of the Ombudsman and response of the Council should be given due consideration as recommended in this report.

8 Appendices

Appendix 1 – Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman's final decision

9 Background papers – there are none