

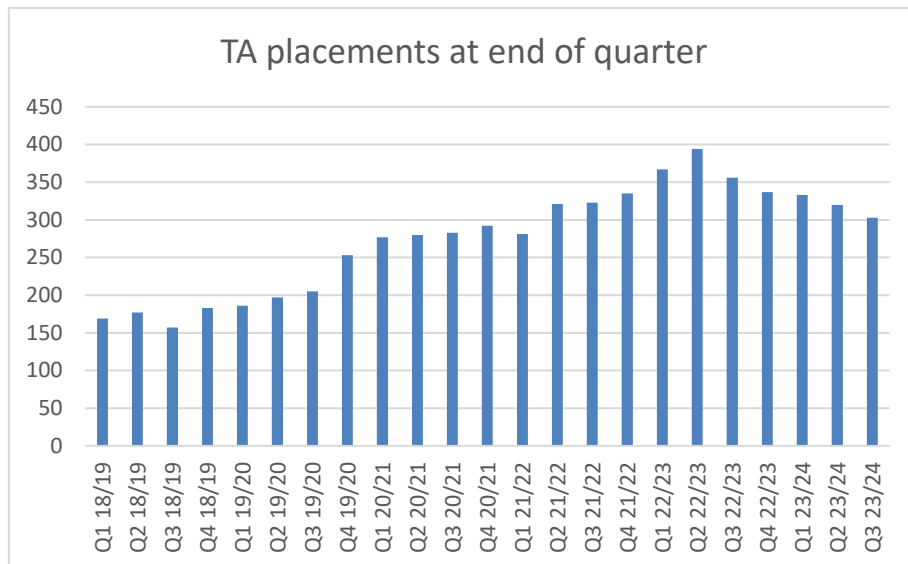
Housing and Health Committee	
Meeting Date	5 th March 2024
Report Title	Temporary Accommodation (TA) Budget Update
EMT Lead	Emma Wiggins, Director of Regeneration and Neighbourhoods
Head of Service	Charlotte Hudson, Head of Housing and Communities
Lead Officer	Charlotte Hudson, Head of Housing and Communities
Classification	Open
Recommendations	The committee is recommended to: 1. To discuss and scrutinise the current controls in place to manage the TA budget.

1 Purpose of Report and Executive Summary

- 1.1 This report provides the Housing and Health Committee with an update on the current controls in place to manage the TA budget, following the previous update in September 2023.

2 Background

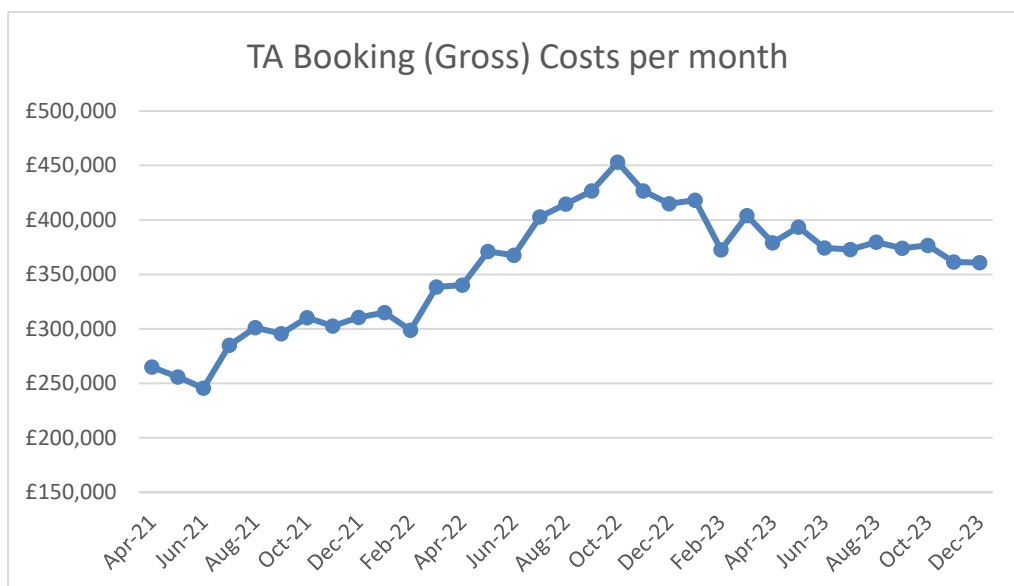
- 2.1 There is a statutory responsibility for the Council to provide TA to clients if they are unintentionally homeless and are in priority need or at the relief stage 'reason to believe' they are in priority need. We also receive funding from DLUHC through the Rough Sleeping Initiative (RSI) and part of this funding enables us to offer some TA to these clients. However, for the purposes of this report we are only focusing on statutory TA.
- 2.2 As reported in September 2023, we have seen a significant increase in the number of households in TA with an 84% increase since 2019 at the peak. Swale has the highest level of TA amongst Kent districts. The households in TA at the end of January 2024 was 314. As members are aware, the current economic climate and the Cost-of-Living crisis places uncertainty on the levels of demand that the service may experience. Although we cannot control the levels of demand, we can ensure that we are delivering the service as efficiently as possible and ensuring prevention work is targeted appropriately.
- 2.3 The chart below shows the TA Placements at the end of each quarter since April 2019.



2.4 The net budget for TA in 2022/23 was £1.4m and net spend was £2.7m, leaving an overspend on this cost centre of £1.3m. During 2022/23 we saw a steady increase in TA placements. As part of the budget setting process for the 2023/24 budget, growth to the budget of £800k was made. This took into consideration increasing demand and increased costs, and the transformation work being carried out by the team.

2.5 The net budget for TA in 2023/24 is £2.12m. At quarter 3 2023/24 budget monitoring, the initial forecast is a year-end overspend of £160k. However, it should be noted that it is incredibly difficult to accurately forecast costs due to the different circumstances and is based on a trend and seasonal forecast.

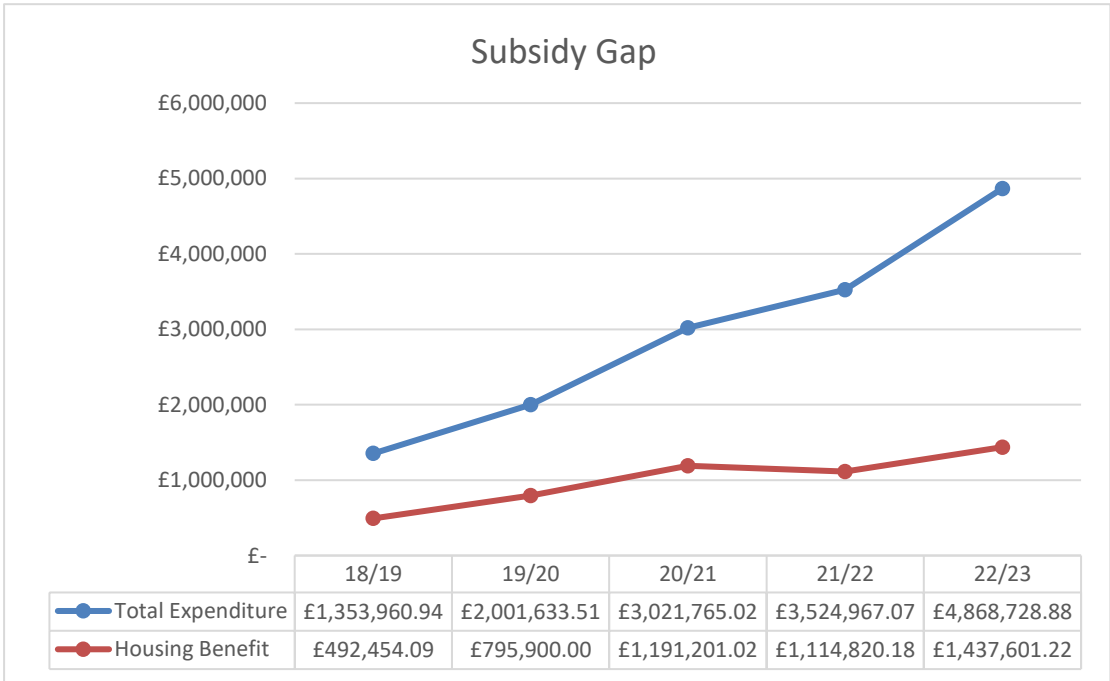
The chart below shows gross TA costs per month.



- 2.6 Part of the costs of TA are offset by housing benefit claims, however, there are restrictions in place which only enable us to claim 90% of the 2011 LHA rate for TA purposes. We also receive the Housing Prevention Grant which was £920,409 for 2023/24. Contributions are sought from working households that are in TA.
- 2.7 Temporary accommodation has been identified as a corporate risk for several years, however, during 2022/23 we steadily saw the numbers in TA rise at a faster rate and therefore more robust mitigations needed to be put in place. Therefore, a Housing Options Improvement project was initiated in July 2022. This work looked at a whole system approach to review the Housing Options service and the whole team have been fully engaged with the service review.
- 2.8 A summary of all interventions is outlined in Appendix I, but the following interventions have been the focus since the last update.

Subsidy Lobbying

2.9 One significant issue that has been identified is that the Housing Benefit subsidy provided to Councils when claiming for the use of TA. As mentioned in 2.6 the subsidy is 90% of the 2011 LHA rates. Therefore, the increased costs of provision have been increasingly borne by the Council. The chart below shows the gap in Gross TA costs and the subsidy claimed each year. It is estimated that if the subsidy utilised today’s LHA rates the Council would receive approx. £500k per year extra in housing benefit.



- 2.10 Swale has been part of the national District Council Network (DCN) cross party lobbying on the government with the following asks:
 - Increase Local Housing Allowance rates for private rented accommodation;

- Develop policy to stimulate retention and supply in the privately rented sector;
- Review the housing benefit subsidy rate for local authority homelessness placements;
- Give district councils the powers, funding, and resources needed to increase the supply of social housing; and
- Increase the level of Discretionary Housing Payment and Homelessness Prevention Grant

2.11 The Leader has represented the Council at these events and the first lobbying point was addressed in the Autumn Statement and the LHA from April onwards has been rebased to the 30 percentiles of the local market rates. Although this will help retain or access the private rented sector for some of our clients, this doesn't directly assist with the cost of TA.

Accommodation Strategy

2.12 One key component of controlling TA was to have an accommodation strategy in place, to ensure we can control the type and costs of TA as much as possible. The main focus has been on our TA purchase programme. This committee agreed in January 2023 to purchase 50 properties for TA use. We are in the process of actively acquiring properties. We have so far completed on 2 properties and have a further 25 under offer and in the conveyancing process. It is anticipated that we will have all 50 properties secured this year.

2.13 In addition to purchasing our own properties we are also pursuing long-term arrangements in relation to accommodation that is being decommissioned as supported accommodation.

System Improvement

2.14 There is a continuous programme of work in place to look at system improvement across the whole service. This has resulted in a focus on enhanced triage to identify entitlement early on. Work is also underway to look at improving our customer access processes and information available to residents on our website. Additional staff have been recruited to enhance resource in this area.

2.15 Additional staffing resources have also been put in place to assist with supporting those clients in TA to progress with finding permanent accommodation, both in the social and private sectors.

3 Proposals

3.1 To discuss and scrutinise the current spend on Temporary Accommodation and note the current mitigation in place.

4 Alternative Options

4.1 None

5 Consultation Undertaken or Proposed

5.1 None

6 Implications

Issue	Implications
Corporate Plan	Priority 1: Building the right homes in the right places and supporting quality jobs for all Priority 3: Tackling deprivation and creating equal opportunities for everyone
Financial, Resource and Property	The purpose of this report is to ensure the committee has oversight and scrutiny of the TA budget.
Legal, Statutory and Procurement	Local housing authorities have a duty to secure accommodation for unintentionally homeless households in priority need under Part 7 of the Housing Act 1996 (as amended). Households might be placed in temporary accommodation pending the completion of inquiries into an application, or they might spend time waiting in temporary accommodation after an application is accepted until suitable secure accommodation becomes available.
Crime and Disorder	The Housing Options Service works closely with the Police, Probation and Prison Service to support clients with offending/ex-offending backgrounds. The Housing Options Service supports victims of domestic abuse and provides appropriate housing support. ASB that takes place within TA is managed by the team.
Environment and Climate/Ecological Emergency	None at this stage.
Health and Wellbeing	There is a significant link between the impact of homelessness and the wider determinants of health. We are working with the Health and Care Partnership looking at prevention pathways.
Safeguarding of Children, Young People and Vulnerable Adults	The Housing Options Service work with a wide range of vulnerable clients and work extensively with partner agencies to support and refer clients to relevant services.
Risk Management and Health and Safety	The TA budget has been identified as a corporate risk, due to demand on the service and the budgetary impacts.

Equality and Diversity	As part of the Housing Assessment process and interview, equality and diversity is taken into consideration.
Privacy and Data Protection	The Housing Options service deals with a wide range of sensitive data and this is managed inline with our corporate policies and is held on a secure database.

7 Appendices

7.1 Appendix I – Summary of Interventions

8 Background Papers

8.1 There are no background papers.

Appendix I – Summary Intervention Plan

Intervention	Intervention Type	Description	Status
Use of Discretionary Housing Payments	Prevention	DHPs are made to households who are struggling with housing costs and administered by Revenue and Benefits, with part of the budget assigned to Housing. We are working closely with Revenue and Benefits to ensure that payments are maximised to relieve homelessness on a long-term basis.	Implemented
Faster payments process for securing PRS properties	Prevention	The prevention and landlord teams were finding it difficult to assist in securing PRS accommodation, as a rent deposit was required. Although we operate a rent deposit scheme for our clients, we could not make the payment quick enough to secure the property. Finance have supported this by facilitating a faster payment process.	Implemented
Landlord Intervention	Prevention and Move on	We have recruited an additional officer to support our Landlord Team. They are working to engage more landlords and look at new products that can encourage landlords to work with us.	Implemented
BEAM	Prevention	BEAM provide employment and housing advice to clients.	Implemented
Xantura and PIP	Prevention	We have access to data analytical tools which help to identify clients that may be at risk of homelessness, we also have an additional worker funded externally to support these clients. A review of the systems available are currently under review.	Partially implemented
Additional training and implementation of toolkits for officers	System improvement	A 2-day training session was provided by an industry leading housing expert to the whole team, in addition toolkits were provided to embed the training.	Implemented

TA sign off	System improvement	The Housing Options Manager is required to authorise every TA Placement. To ensure consistency and accuracy of placements.	Implemented
Backlog of decisions and outsourcing reviews	System Improvement	<p>Due to the complex nature of cases, we were experiencing a backlog of case decisions. This can limit the options for move on/ or mean that we are accommodating people that are not entitled to accommodation. Focused work to reduce the backlog has taken place.</p> <p>Case reviews must be carried out by a more senior officer than the officer who made the decision, there were limited officers to deal with the most complex cases and reviews. We had previously outsourced reviews to another authority but due to their increased workload they were no longer able to provide this service, we have now secured a new provider.</p>	Implemented.
Enhanced Triage	System Improvement	We have created a new role of Senior Triage Officer and seconded an existing housing officer into this role. This officer carries out in-depth triage before a housing interview takes place and looks to see if there are any options to resolve homelessness. This has led to a significant reduction in clients needing to make a homeless application.	Implemented
Customer Access inc. Triage (New system processes)	System Improvement	As part of the roll out of the new Humme system, the system will enable more interaction with clients and access to advice and information. The new Humme system has been implemented and work is underway looking at customer access process.	Being implemented
Review of management of complex cases and	System improvement	The team identified they were spending a lot of their time dealing with the complex nature of their client's cases, where other agencies had responsibility. Alongside the safeguarding team, we have been working on individual	Implemented

safeguarding responses.		cases and working with partner agencies to improve this process and free up staff time to focus on housing case management.	
Maximising Housing benefit Claims	Cost Control /Income Maximisation	We have improved the process of housing benefit claims on TA placements, to ensure we are claiming the maximum amount of housing benefit allowed.	Implemented
Contributions Policy	Cost Control /Income Maximisation	The Committee agreed the TA Policy, this also formalised the ability to collect contributions towards TA from working households. This was already taking place but formalised the position.	Implemented
Procurement of Night Let Accommodation	Cost Control /Income Maximisation	A joint tender with Maidstone and Tunbridge Wells to create a purchase framework for NL accommodation was run in order to stabilise and control costs, however the market failed to respond, and no contract was awarded. The existing spot purchase arrangements remain in place.	Paused.
TA Purchase	Cost Control /Income Maximisation	Committee agreed in Jan 2023, to purchase 50 properties for use of TA. This project is being implemented, 2 properties have been purchased and a further 23 are in conveyancing. This will enable the cost of TA Placement to be more efficient.	Being Implemented.
TA Case Focus (10)	Move on	When we analysed our TA data, we identified that we had a consistent flow in and out of TA. However, we also noted that we still had a large number of households we therefore took an in-depth review of 10 cases at a time to look at how we can look at what the barriers were to move on. We have also identified additional resource and are currently recruiting 2 visiting officers to increase this work.	Implemented.
TA 4+ Project	Move on	From the analysis we identified that households with a 4+ bedroom need had been in TA the longest, the cost of TA is also the highest. This is due to very limited properties coming through the housing register or affordable in the PRS. We are therefore taking a more detailed look at these	Being implemented

		cases and looking at longer-term strategies to support these households.	
Affordable Housing Delivery	Move on	We work with Registered Providers and negotiate with developers as part of the planning process to secure affordable housing in the borough. Swale Rainbow Homes has been set-up to increase delivery of affordable housing.	Implemented
Supported Accommodation	Move on	As part of the Kent Homeless Connect Contract changes at KCC, we managed to secure funding through RSI funding and transition funding to secure supported accommodation which is used for RSI clients but also move on accommodation for suitable clients. We are also looking into securing further supported accommodation that is currently being decommissioned.	Implemented
Strategic Relationship with Southern Housing	Partnerships	We regularly meet with Southern Housing (as our stock transfer RP) to look at how they can support us in tackling the TA problem. They are currently supporting us with TA Provision, they have also been looking to improve the time it takes to carry out void works so properties become available quicker.	Implemented
Linkage to Cost of Living Work	Partnerships	Extensive work has been done on the CoL in Swale, particularly through the Household Support Fund and in partnership with the voluntary and community sector. We are working with this partnership to identify households that need support. However, with the HSF ending at the end of March this could put further pressures on residents that are at risk of being homeless.	Implemented
Increased staffing	Resources	We have managed to secure funding for additional posts to support the work of the team. These include Visiting Officers who can work more proactively with residents in TA and support them with actions in their Personal Housing Plan.	Partially Implemented

Evidence Gathering and Campaigning on LHA Rates	Lobbying	The Leader has participated in the national lobbying work to increase LHA rates and the subsidy provided to Local Councils.	Partially Implemented
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