

Councillor Call For Action

Overview & Scrutiny Panel 30 August 2022

Report Author	Committee Services Manager
Portfolio Holder	Councillor Jill Bayford, Cabinet Member for Housing
Status	For Recommendation
Classification:	Unrestricted
Key Decision	No
Ward:	Margate Central

Executive Summary:

A Councillor Call For Action has been submitted by Ward Councillor for Margate Central, Councillor Helen Whitehead, regarding the rising eviction numbers for low income households that has been caused by rising costs of rentals and market pressures. The Panel is required to consider the call for action and make recommendations if appropriate.

The report also advises members of the Overview and Scrutiny Panel that the Cabinet will be considering a report at its meeting on 22 September, which will consider the wider challenges faced by the council in addressing local housing needs and setting out proposed national changes that would enable the delivery of more affordable homes.

Recommendation(s):

1. With reference to the options in para 3.0 of the report, Members' guidance is sought on how to progress the call for action request;
2. Members are also asked to note that a wider report on housing delivery will be considered by cabinet at its meeting on 22 September.

Corporate Implications

Financial and Value for Money

There are no financial implications riding directly from this report.

Legal

The role of scrutiny is set out in section 9F of the Local Government Act 2000. The Council must also have regard to the statutory guidance on Overview and Scrutiny from the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government when exercising its functions.

Risk Management

There are risks arising directly from this report.

Corporate

The Overview and Scrutiny Panel is required by the Council's Constitution to consider and decide whether there is merit in discussing the call in request under the Councillor Call for Action Protocol or to sign post the request to a different pathway for decision.

Equality Act 2010 & Public Sector Equality Duty

Members are reminded of the requirement, under the Public Sector Equality Duty (section 149 of the Equality Act 2010) to have due regard to the aims of the Duty at the time the decision is taken. The aims of the Duty are: (i) eliminate unlawful discrimination, harassment, victimisation and other conduct prohibited by the Act, (ii) advance equality of opportunity between people who share a protected characteristic and people who do not share it, and (iii) foster good relations between people who share a protected characteristic and people who do not share it.

Protected characteristics: age, sex, disability, race, sexual orientation, gender reassignment, religion or belief and pregnancy & maternity. Only aim (i) of the Duty applies to Marriage & civil partnership.

This report relates to the following aim of the equality duty: -

- To eliminate unlawful discrimination, harassment, victimisation and other conduct prohibited by the Act.
- To advance equality of opportunity between people who share a protected characteristic and people who do not share it
- To foster good relations between people who share a protected characteristic and people who do not share it.

No implications arise directly but the Council needs to retain a strong focus and understanding on issues of diversity amongst the local community and ensure service delivery matches these.

It was important to be aware of the Council's responsibility under the Public Sector Equality Duty (PSED) and show evidence that due consideration has been given to the equalities impact that may be brought upon communities by the decisions made by Council.

Corporate Priorities

This report relates to the following corporate priorities: -

- Communities

1.0 Introduction and Background

1.1 On 4 August 2022, Democratic Services received a councillor call for action (CCfA) request from Councillor Helen Whitehead. The main focus of the call is for the Panel to debate the emerging issue where vulnerable households were now facing evictions in increasing numbers in Margate Central due to a sharp rise in rental costs making it unaffordable for low income or vulnerable households.

- 1.2 It is for the Panel to decide whether to accept the CCfA request and then hold a hearing (an item on the next Overview and Scrutiny Panel agenda) where the Panel can make recommendations to Cabinet or to reject the request, in which case no further action will be taken.
- 1.3 The rules and procedures for dealing with a Councillor Call for Action are outlined in Part 4 of the Council Constitution starting on page 62: [Part 4 Council Procedure Rules](#)
- 1.4 Separately to this process, a report is being prepared for the meeting of Cabinet on 22 September 2022, which will consider the wider challenges faced by the council in addressing local housing needs and setting out proposed national changes that would enable the delivery of more affordable homes (See section 3, below).

2.0 The Current Situation

- 2.1 It is important to recognise that CCfA is not guaranteed to solve a given problem. CCfA can provide a method for discussing such problems and, through discussion, trying to overcome them.
- 2.2 Prior to a Councillor referring a matter as a CCfA to the Panel, a Councillor must have tried to resolve the issue / problem themselves using all mechanisms and resources available to them at Ward level. Cllr Whitehead has submitted a variety of documents and emails to illustrate the actions that she has taken. These are attached at annexes to the report.
- 2.3 The main focus of the call is for the Panel to debate the emerging issue where vulnerable households were now facing evictions in increased numbers in Margate Central. The call further reports that those families that rely on Local Housing Allowances (LHA), were finding it more difficult to re-enter the housing rental market once they have been evicted. These evictions were causing displacement of families in the area. The call further cites that the lack of funding to build additional council housing was also contributing to the displacement of low income families. The request also states that some households were approaching their ward councillor before eviction to report that they were no longer able to keep pace with the rising costs of rental due to the inflationary rent increases.
- 2.4 The call indicates that the inflationary rises in rental costs was affecting all wards in Thanet. Councillor Whitehead indicated that she had raised this matter with the Head of Housing (Director of Housing), at Full Council and Cabinet meetings. Cllr Whitehead has also written to the government, addressing the matter to the relevant ministers. The detailed submissions of the request are highlighted in Annex 1 to the report.
- 2.5 A Member discussion on the affordable rental market in Thanet but more specifically in Margate Central might assist in identifying an approach that the Council could take in addressing this matter. The Panel can only debate the matter and if they decide to make any recommendations for further consideration of this matter, then any such recommendations would have to be forwarded to Cabinet.

3.0 Housing Need in Thanet

- 3.1 The issues raised in this CCfA are not new and are set out within the council's Housing, Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy, published in March 2020. The strategy identified 19,471 households or 29% of the population are on a low income, which is defined as less than £15,988 per annum. On average, earnings are £462.50 per week which is within the bottom 20% of the whole of England. The strategy also identified that more than 80% of the population in Thanet, cannot afford to buy an averagely priced terraced house.
- 3.2 Similarly, in the private sector, tenants are spending over 50% of their earnings on living costs. The median income for Thanet is £25,000 and to be affordable, the National Housing Federation identifies that only 30% of income should be spent on housing costs. For all property sizes, with the exception of 1 bedroom flats, rents levels are above this benchmark.
- 3.3 The figures above are based on the position in March 2020, when the strategy was published. Recent increases in inflation, fuel and food costs and increased demand in the private rented sector as a result of COVID-19, have resulted in these affordability gaps increasing, and we anticipate the position to deteriorate further in the coming months. Currently there are around 1,600 households on the council's housing register in housing need, and around 1,000 homeless applications each year.
- 3.4 The council's adopted Local Plan identifies a need for 548 affordable homes, and a key element of the response to these pressures is the delivery of new affordable homes for rent. In the 10 years from 2011 to 2021 the district saw an average of 61 affordable homes delivered each year. This figure increased to 126 in 2021/22 and is projected to increase further to 314 in 2022/23.
- 3.5 The council's own development programme is making a significant contribution to this and has already spent or committed £31.9m to building and acquiring new affordable homes for rent. The Housing Revenue Account Business Plan projects a further £8.1 per annum over the coming 10 years, providing a total of up to 500 new homes.
- 3.6 In addition to this planned investment the council has:
- Reviewed its local plan policy in relation to affordable homes and reduced the threshold from 15 to 11 units for qualifying sites, and adopted a first homes interim policy statement.
 - Invested in homelessness prevention services, including additional advisors, with access to funding for rent-in-advance and deposit payments to support households facing homelessness. Since the introduction of the Homelessness Reduction Act on 3 April 2018, these services have prevented 2,434 households from becoming homeless.
 - Fully utilised the available Discretionary Housing Payments funding to support homelessness prevention activities.
 - Constructed or acquired around 140 new affordable homes for rent, with sites progressing for a further 40 new homes.
 - Nearly completed refurbishment of the council's first owned and managed temporary accommodation project.

- Bid for opportunities for additional government funding for homelessness services as they have arisen, and in particular delivered intensive support for rough sleepers, through the council's RISE service.
- Successfully prosecuted landlords for offences relating to the Housing, Health and Safety Rating System, selective and HMO licensing and illegal eviction and harassment.

3.7 These services have made a significant difference in improving outcomes for some of the district's most vulnerable residents. However, the evidence clearly shows that more needs to be, and can be done if the necessary resources are available. A report detailing the growing difficulties that households on low incomes face in securing suitable homes and considering the barriers to the delivery of new homes and the resources required to implement further meaningful interventions in the future, will be considered at the council's Cabinet at its meeting on 22 September 2022.

4.0 Options

- 4.1 The Panel could opt to debate the call for action request and agree to conduct a full hearing at an agreed future Panel meeting.
- 4.2 Members could choose to debate the call for action request and make recommendations for consideration by Cabinet.
- 4.3 Members could opt to debate the councillor call for action and thereafter decide to take no further action.

5.0 Next Steps

- 5.1 If the Overview and Scrutiny Panel makes recommendations to Cabinet, a report would be drafted for consideration by Cabinet. Any decision by Cabinet will be reported back to the Panel.

Contact Officer: Charles Hungwe, Senior Democratic Services Officer
Reporting to: Nick Hughes, Committee Services Manager

Annex List

- Annex 1: Councillor Call for Action form
- Annex 2: airbnb
- Annex 3: Budget Discussion on NHB O and S
- Annex 4: Cabinet 27 January
- Annex 5: Cabinet June 16th 2022 CCfA
- Annex 6: Dep Leader Rent Affordability letter - RJ 21/05/21
- Annex 7: Screenshots
- Annex 8: Foy House
- Annex 9: G and A July 2022 CCfA
- Annex 10: Gove letter
- Annex 11: NHB budget speech
- Annex 12: O and S budget speech rental costs and new homes bonus CCfA
- Annex 13: Planning speech

Background Papers

TDC Constitution: [TDC Constitution](#)

Corporate Consultation

Finance: (Insert name and job title)

Legal: Sameera Khan, Interim Head of Legal & Monitoring Officer