

Customer and Community Scrutiny Committee Report

Report of Head of Housing Advices Services

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Date: 21 October 2014

Guildford Borough Homelessness Strategy – Annual Review

Recommendation to Committee:

That the committee having reviewed this report is satisfied that since adopting the strategy in 2013, the key actions of the Homelessness Strategy and action plans have been progressed in a timely manner.

Reason for Recommendation:

In order to ensure the committee's support for the strategy and action plans .To review our approach and ensure we continue to meet our duty under the Homelessness Act 2002 to those facing homelessness.

1 Executive summary

1.1 Our Homelessness Strategy provides the framework for the delivery of our services designed to prevent homelessness and support those who become homeless.

1.2 The associated action plan has four themes

- managing the impact of welfare change
- sustaining and creating access to accommodation
- tackling rough sleeping and single homelessness
- service delivery, strategic partnerships and communication.

94% of the planned actions are completed or currently on track.

1.3 Our response to the initial phase of the national welfare reform changes have largely been successful. We remain concerned however about the potential impact of the more extensive changes still to be implemented by the Government.

- 1.4 Access to the private rented sector by low income households is increasingly difficult, despite the incentives we offer landlords. The Local Housing Allowance (LHA) is failing to keep up with market forces in this area, which continue to push rents higher. The result is that the private rented sector is becoming increasingly out of reach to low income households. The report explores options to mitigate this impact on some of the most vulnerable.
- 1.5 Rough sleeping is at higher levels than previously and the incidence of those at risk of rough sleeping is growing. Working with the Homeless Outreach and Support Team (HOST) we are continuing to help people off the streets with the support of the town centre hostels and other agencies.
- 1.6 The reports highlights some of the consequences if current housing pressures translate into increasing homelessness levels.

2 Strategic priorities

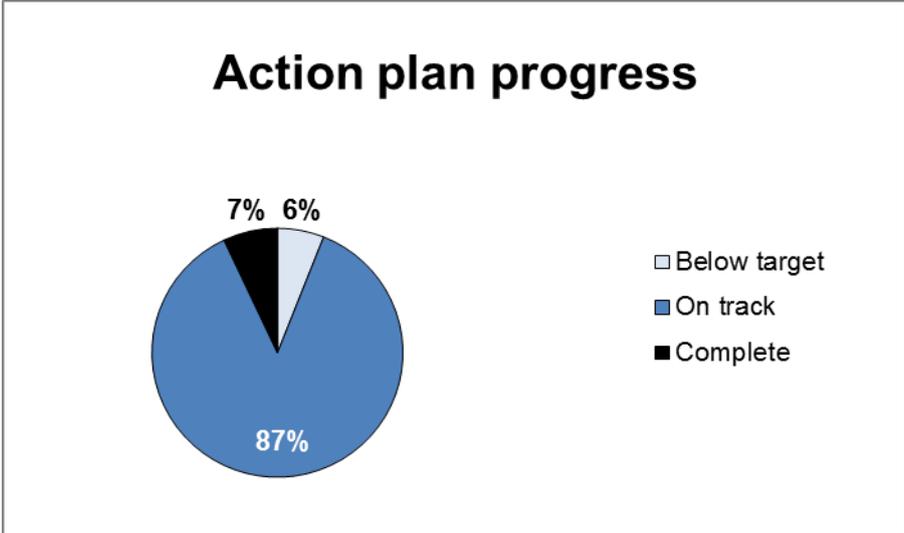
- 2.1 The implementation of our Homelessness Strategy forms one of our Corporate Plan priorities under the theme of Society.
- 2.2 The aim of the strategy is to prevent homelessness and ensure that we are able to offer appropriate help and support to those who are more vulnerable and less able to meet their own housing needs.

3. Background

- 3.1 The Homelessness Act 2002 places a duty on the Council to carry out a review of homelessness in our area and produce a strategy to prevent homelessness at least every five years. The current Homelessness Strategy covers the period 2013-2018 and provides the framework and direction for the delivery of our homelessness services during this period. We have now reached the end of the first year therefore wish to reflect on our progress to date and review the strategy action plans to ensure they will continue to meet our overall objectives.
- 3.2 The strategy and action plans focus on three key areas:
 - managing the impact of welfare change
 - sustaining and creating access to accommodation
 - tackling rough sleeping and single homelessness.

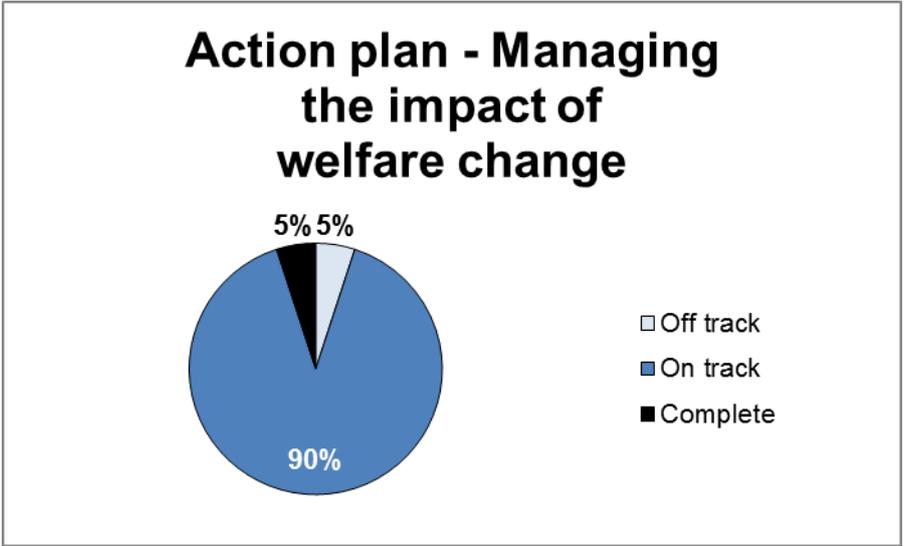
In addition, there is an action plan in respect to service delivery, strategic partnerships and communication.

- 3.3 During the first year we have made good progress against our actions in the strategy:



- 3.4 We analysed a range of indicators to assess trends that may indicate we need to vary our approach or priorities in the action plans. A summary of key statistical data is set out in Appendix 2, updating that provided in the strategy last year.
- 3.5 Further information and data on housing need is included in the Draft Housing Strategy 2015-2020 which is also on this agenda.
- 3.6 Although we are making progress in terms of the action plans, we are facing significant pressures in relation to homelessness, which are discussed below.

Managing the impact of welfare change



- 3.7 A report on the local impact of the welfare changes was considered recently by the Corporate Improvement Scrutiny Committee on 18 September. This may be viewed at:
[Home - Corporate Improvement Scrutiny Committee 2014/2015](#)

- 3.8 Appendix 3 sets out a range of case studies demonstrating the effects of welfare reform.

Local Housing Allowance

- 3.9 Our greatest challenge has been the changes made to the Local Housing Allowance (LHA) payable on private rented homes. In April 2011, the LHA payable reduced from the 50th to the 30th percentile of rents, reducing the number of properties that should be available for those in receipt of benefits from five out of ten to three out of ten¹.
- 3.10 The LHA is based on rents across a Broad Rental Market Area (BRMA). Unfortunately; this does not take account of higher rents within parts of the BRMA compared to others. As Guildford has higher rents, we are at a particular disadvantage with fewer than three in ten private rented homes being at LHA levels and now the gap between LHA and markets rents is significant and increasing for all property sizes. For example, the LHA rate for a three bed roomed property in Guildford has decreased from £1174 per month to £1149 per month (from 1 April 2014); however the average market rent for a three bed roomed home has increased from £1394 to £1576.

Guildford Local Housing Allowance rates/average monthly rents	2012-13	2013-14	2014-15
3 bed average monthly rental (£)	£1406	£1394	£1576
3 bed Guildford LHA rate (£)	£1149	£1174	£1149
2 bed average monthly rental (£)	£1166	£1203	£1260
2 bed Guildford LHA rate (£)	£900	£919	£928

- 3.11 A further change to LHA from January 2012 was the age at which single people could claim for self-contained accommodation, which increased from twenty five to thirty five. As single people are not normally a priority under homelessness this presents difficulties for people with multiple needs, who don't fall within the exemption rules and for whom shared living arrangements can be problematic.
- 3.12 As a result of these changes, the vast majority of private rented sector accommodation within Guildford borough is now unaffordable to people in receipt of welfare benefits and those on low incomes. The gap between market rents and LHA is likely to widen further as increases in LHA have been pegged to 1% (and may potentially be frozen under current proposals). Discretionary Housing Payment is able to assist bridge the gap between rent

¹ This does not take account of whether a landlord will accept a benefit claimant as a tenant.

charged and LHA, however, this is only a temporary measure and not a solution.

- 3.13 The Corporate Improvement Scrutiny Committee on 18 September felt so strongly about this issue they recommended that the Lead Councillor for Housing and Welfare write to the rent officer to express their concern.

The benefit cap

- 3.14 The benefit cap came into effect in July 2013 and applies to the combined income of households receiving main out-of-work benefits, plus Child Benefit and Child Tax Credits.

The cap is:

- £500 per week for couples and lone parents
- £350 per week for single adults

The benefit cap affects both private and social housing tenants. Although the numbers are small, the impact is high and the solutions difficult.

- 3.15 The preparation for this change undertaken by the Housing Benefit team and Housing Advice Services succeeded in minimising these cases and many families voluntarily moved to more affordable accommodation before the changes took effect, any delays being covered by DHP.
- 3.16 Although we have successfully prevented homelessness by the use of DHP, clients expectations are that these payments will be renewed and they often decline to move to affordable accommodation while payment is being made. This creates an over reliance on short-term financial support and a disincentive to seek a permanent solution.
- 3.17 Numbers affected by the benefit cap were lower than initially expected and every effort has been made to ensure those affected are claiming the right benefits, especially Disability Living Allowance. We have identified a small number of larger families subject to the benefit cap who face challenges in identifying suitably sized affordable accommodation within the LHA rate. To meet affordability calculations we place some of these families in smaller private rented, Council or housing association stock. The reality facing these families is the need to obtain work, which removes the benefit cap or to move away to a cheaper area.
- 3.18 As part of our homelessness strategy, we have tried to encourage these families to engage with our Employment Training Housing Options and Support (ETHOS)² project (see 3.34-3.36). To date it has been difficult to get this particular group to accept they need to seek employment to avoid the benefit cap.
- 3.19 Despite publicity, there is still a perception that an offer of social housing is the answer to the benefit cap. This is not always the case as the benefit cap applies to all families regardless of landlord or tenure, although rents are lower in the social rented sector.
- 3.20 It has highlighted the need for us and our partner agencies, to promote the importance of work and continuously encourage these families to gain employment.

² Employment Training Housing Options and Support (ETHOS) is run by Surrey Lifelong Learning Partnership (SLLP) and funded by Elmbridge BC, Epsom and Ewell BC, Guildford BC, Mole Valley DC; Tandridge DC,

- 3.21 There are indications that landlords are incurring rent losses as a result of the benefit cap. We recognise the importance of supporting landlords and work continues to prevent evictions, minimise arrears and sustain relationships with the private rented sector.
- 3.22 As the case studies demonstrate, non-engagement presents an ongoing challenge for all statutory agencies raising safeguarding concerns which impacts on Children's Services; the situation may not be easily resolved. We also have people who are willing to co-operate but will not be able to gain employment due to the prohibitive cost and availability of childcare. These cases will need to relocate outside of Guildford in a cheaper area or the shortfall of the rent may need to be met directly by the Council and or potentially Children Services.

The removal of the spare room subsidy for social housing tenants

- 3.23 The changes to benefits linked to under-occupation were introduced in April 2013. They affect social housing tenants who are assessed as having more bedrooms than they require by cutting a fixed percentage of the rent eligible for housing benefit. This is set at 14 per cent for one extra bedroom and 25 per cent for two or more extra bedrooms. Locally some 486 social housing tenants were affected when this change was introduced.
- 3.24 We have undertaken a range of projects and initiatives to mitigate the impact of under-occupation. Tenants have been encouraged and helped to downsize with increased promotion of mutual exchanges and transfers and the number of tenants affected reduced by just over 22% by the end of March 2014.
- 3.25 We created a new post of Transfer Officer within Housing Advice Services and a key part of the role is helping tenants who are under occupying their homes to downsize. While some tenants have no support needs and have never previously had to consider moving, others are vulnerable, have additional support needs and assistance involves considerable contact time.
- 3.26 In addition to organising five mutual exchange events during 2013-14, the Transfer Officer works with the Money Advisor in Neighbourhood and Housing Management Services, identifying those in receipt of discretionary financial support and helping them understand the housing options open to them. As a result of these measures In 2013/14, 88 households downsized. Between April and August 2014, 21 households downsized.
- 3.27 Use of DHP has been used to support families affected by the removal of the spare room subsidy and prevent homelessness although in some instances it will only or delay possession action whilst we continue to look at housing options for those affected.

Other support

- 3.28 Despite the challenges, we have had success in managing the impact of the welfare changes for many of our residents. The corporate response across the services has been key to the successful management of the welfare reform changes to date. There has been a greater understanding and commitment to prevent homelessness. Our flexible approaches to casework, internal initiatives and the facility to signpost to the CAB and ETHOS have helped us to prepare residents for the welfare reform changes. This has

meant we have made significant efforts to minimise arrears, maximise income and provide options regarding education, training and employment.

- 3.29 Working closely with the CAB money advice services, we are dealing with increasing numbers of complex cases that require representation at court and at tribunals. Examples of this include stay applications to postpone evictions, and attendance at tribunals to challenge eligibility for Personal Independent Payments (PIP). It is still too early into the welfare reform timetable to assess the full impact, but without the expertise of CAB, we would have incurred financial losses in relation to income recovery and increased emergency accommodation costs.
- 3.30 The Housing possession court desk gives on the day housing advice to anyone appearing in front of Guildford County Court. This service has operated by Woking CAB with the support of Guildford and Waverley CABx for over 14 years. It has been funded primarily from main CAB funding, although from time to time local councils have given small grants.
- 3.31 In 2012, the DCLG decided that future government funding for housing advice at court should be via the Legal Aid Agency (LAA) but provided grant aid of £18,500 for one year in advance of any changes, which we used to fund Woking CAB³. The funding provided for an enhanced and more flexible service and was to run until October 2013.
- 3.32 The new LAA contract for housing court possession desk was awarded to Surrey Law Centre(SLC) from April 2013. Woking CAB has continued to deliver and self-fund their work since October 2013 with ongoing support from Guildford CAB, as they see it as a core service and due to concerns about the LAA contract as it is restricted to those who qualify for Legal Aid other than those presenting for brief 'on the day' advice at court. These concerns have increased as SLC are not currently providing any service and have not done so since March 2014. SLC has notified the LAA of their intention to withdraw from the contract. Officers are in contact with the LAA to seek clarification about future service at the Court and are advised that they are looking into the matter.
- 3.33 We are concerned about the need for ongoing access to legal advice for those in court facing repossessions. Our Homelessness Prevention Officers will go to represent clients who are reluctant to engage with their landlords where necessary, but we cannot represent a Council tenant in court as this is a conflict of interest. If people have representation at court, it can result in an adjournment to allow time for them to get further advice. The CAB service is therefore invaluable and we are in discussion with both Guildford and Woking CAB about how we can continue to deliver the service and follow up this work with in depth money advice involving areas of people's lives other than housing.
- 3.34 We have successfully raised the profile of ETHOS, which is managed by the Surrey Lifelong Learning Partnership. This service aims to reduce welfare dependency and promote solutions to help residents gain the skills and confidence to become work ready and find jobs.
- 3.35 From April 2013 to August 2014 the ETHOS advisor has worked with 101 clients of which 71 gained a job, took up training, work experience or

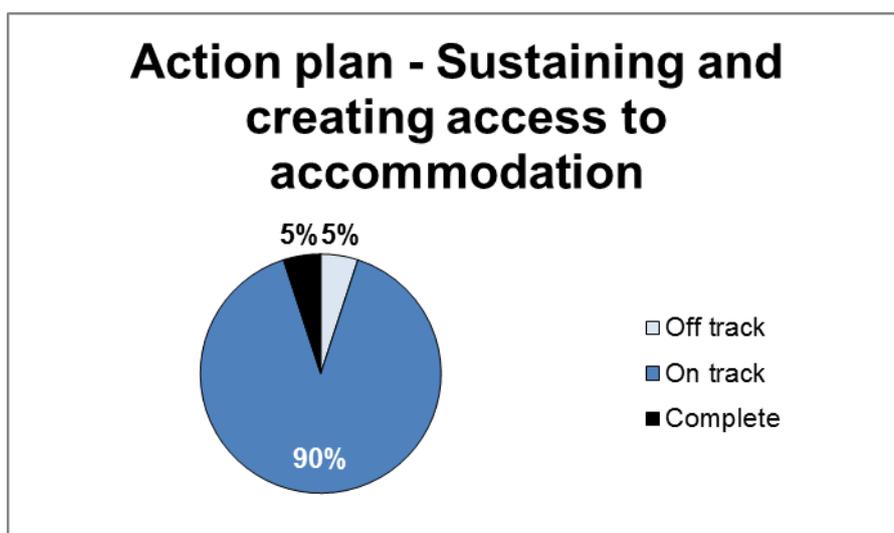
³ Although this Council received the DCLG funding it was to be used for the benefit of any possession work dealt with by Guildford County Court, which deals with cases from various boroughs and districts.

voluntary work. This is a successful outcome given that many of those referred were not job ready, lacked qualifications and skills and had low confidence and self esteem.

- 3.36 ETHOS provides a range of activities and initiatives to encourage hard to engage people to explore their options. This includes :
- employability workshops for clients
 - digital inclusion courses at entry and intermediate levels for homeless people
 - a partnership with Jamie Oliver’s Food Foundation and Riverside ECHG, offering hostel residents cookery master classes
 - the creation of a Guildford works directory
 - attendance and provision of supported for the job clubs
 - building links with employers to secure work experience opportunities
 - providing employment advice at Guildford Bike Project .
 - weekly attendance at children’s centres to offer advice to parents.

3.37 As welfare reform continues this will continue to present a major challenge for those on low incomes in housing need. Both our corporate approach to this and joint work with partners is making a difference .We will continue to work in partnership to identify those affected, develop appropriate initiatives and advice, and target assistance to those in need of help. The delay in the introduction of Universal Credit in Surrey until 2016 is welcome, but will present a significant challenge when implemented.. The greatest risk to homelessness prevention remains the LHA rates and reduced availability of private rented homes.

Sustaining and creating access to accommodation



- 3.38 Households continue to be at risk of homelessness through their inability to access alternative housing or remain in their present homes. Key issues include the difficulty accessing private rented housing, longer waits for social housing and limited emergency and temporary housing options.
- 3.39 As the pool of available affordable accommodation shrinks, our work increasingly focuses on helping people to remain in their existing home rather than finding alternative accommodation. This work is detailed and we often need to take a more holistic approach to deal with the wider underlying issues that contribute to the housing problem.
- 3.40 Housing Advice services have seen an increase in enquiries and we have managed to deal with this within our current staff resources. We recently reviewed the Homelessness Prevention team structure and re-designated two posts from housing advice to homelessness prevention to reflect the change in the profile of our work.
- 3.41 The Homelessness Prevention Team have seen a drop in general advice enquiries since last year and an increase in more targeted housing options work. In the first quarter 2014-15, we saw 190 cases compared to 169 in the same period the previous year. In 2013-14 the total housing options cases increased to 656 from 614 in 2012-13. Projections suggest that if this increase is sustained the overall caseload for the team could be 760 cases this year. This increase is also reflected in the HOST caseload with 140 cases seen in the first quarter 2014-15 compared to 113 in the same period last year.
- 3.42 Instrumental to our success at helping people to remain in their homes has been our conciliation work and ability to resolve rent arrears and housing benefit problems where possible. Our partnership working with the Housing Benefit team has enabled us to use DHP appropriately, giving us time to negotiate with landlords over rents or find other solutions. This has enabled the Homes 4 U rent deposit team to retain landlords and keep people in their homes and has been critical in maintaining the number of lets
- 3.43 We continue to refer to CAB money advice services to assist with cases that are more complex and which require support in non-housing related aspects of the support needed. We would have seen an increase in homelessness without their work and expertise in this area. They have contributed to the ongoing homelessness prevention work and this is reflected in the homelessness prevention figures for 2013/14 of 513 compared to the previous year at 466.
- 3.44 The impact of welfare reform on working households is becoming more of an issue and we have seen a 28 per cent increase in such households claiming housing benefit since 2010. This reflects the constrained income and the high cost of accommodation in the area.

Private rented sector

- 3.45 The private sector has been a source of good quality accommodation over the past six years. However as discussed above the changes to LHA have now made it very difficult to access an adequate supply of affordable and sustainable homes in the private sector. The LHA at the 30th percentile does not reflect the rent charged within our borough and we have seen a drop in the number of private rented sector lets that we have been able to procure for homeless families, particularly two bedroomed properties.

- 3.46 Our Guildford rental market monitoring in May 2014 showed that of 166 available two bedroomed properties only one was within LHA rates. Between April and August this year, 21 families required two bedroomed accommodation against an available 14 properties. This resulted in 10 families moving into one bedroomed homes.
- 3.47 Sourcing private rented accommodation has always been a challenge although we could usually rely on finding affordable accommodation in the Ash and Ash Vale area. However, now we are facing difficulties obtaining accommodation there too. We face competition from surrounding boroughs who also cannot easily find accommodation and are, like us, having to search beyond their borough boundaries.
- 3.48 The Localism Act 2011 enables councils to discharge their homelessness duties through an offer of a private sector home with a tenancy of at least two years without the consent of the household. Due to provision being limited, we are only likely to be using this when we can place families in long term tenancies close to existing support networks. This is not available to us in the current market.
- 3.49 To secure new and retain existing access to private rented through our Homes4U scheme we increasingly have to offer larger bonds and pay substantially more than one months rent in advance (which we later recoup through HB). This removes the market requirement of providing a guarantor, which is an obstacle many of our clients face and enables them to access to this accommodation.
- 3.50 Homes 4U total lettings have remained relatively stable, showing 98 in 2011-2012, 102 in 2012-13 and 103 in 2013-2014. However, our projection for 2014- 2015 is for 80 lets, a significant reduction which reflects the number of affordable properties available.
- 3.51 Although it is much harder to secure private rented housing, we are fortunate that we have a supply of private rented properties from property owners that have worked with us over a number of years and understand what we can do to ensure a successful tenancy. The recent recruitment of a Tenancy Sustainment Officer will increase the capacity of the Homes 4U service to be more proactive in supporting our existing landlords and sourcing new landlords willing to accept rents within the LHA in return for the support we can offer them.
- 3.52 We will need to consider other forms of incentives to landlords as the supply of housing within the LHA rate reduces. Other Surrey authorities are now offering extra incentives so we should review our approach otherwise we will lose a share of the market.
- 3.53 Our current offer is normally a deposit in the form of a bond which is equivalent to one and half months rent and, in some cases, a month's rent in advance. Although the bond is not normally in cash, it is a guarantee with a financial limit that the landlord can claim when the tenancy ends. This can mean a commitment to pay £2325 for a two bedroomed home and £2875 for a three bedroomed home. Unfortunately this offer is no longer attractive in the current market.
- 3.54 Increasingly, landlords are asking for six months rent in advance and also require in many cases, the prospective renter to have an employed, working age guarantor with an income of at least £36,000 gross per annum. This has made it very difficult for us to source new rented properties. The result has

been an increase in emergency placements including bed and breakfast accommodation.

- 3.55 Other councils in Surrey offer a variety of incentives for example:
- a package of up to £4800 including electrical certificates, gas safety certificates and/or cash incentives – all non refundable.
 - £500 package including electrical, EPC and gas safety certificates.
 - acting as guarantor for the life of the tenancy to ensure access for local people to private rented sector in their borough.
- 3.56 To retain our existing relationships and secure new landlords we need to consider improving our current offer. Options include:
- To consider longer DHP awards up to a year where appropriate.
 - for cases residing within the borough, where there is no guarantor, the Council may need to pay rent up front at six monthly intervals throughout the life of the tenancy. We could extend this to placements outside of the borough, in exceptional circumstances, but this poses a greater risk as it is more difficult to visit and check property conditions when they are further away. There is also increased risk of fraud..
 - increasing the bond from one and a half months rent.
 - offering an incentive package to include electrical safety, EPC and gas safety certificates.
 - setting up a private rented sector leasing scheme which would offer property procurement, in house management and maintenance.
 - considering extending the scope of our Homes4U service and it becoming a social lettings agency.

All these options present a degree of risk but need to be explored as a the position is unlikely to improve for the foreseeable future and are likely to worsen if further cuts are made to LHA .

Housing association accommodation

- 3.57 We currently lease a number of blocks of flats to Rosebery Housing Association that we use to prevent homelessness or for temporary accommodation. Rosebery assists us to support vulnerable households who have previously had poor tenancies histories or that no other landlord will consider. These flats play a key role in helping us to minimise the use of bed and breakfast emergency accommodation.
- 3.58 In meeting our duty to families, we rely heavily on this accommodation and tend to place younger or more vulnerable families who may find it more difficult to sustain a private sector tenancy. Unfortunately, throughput in these units is low as households have little incentive to move-on to the private rented sector and the preference is to wait for social housing. We constantly review the management of move on from these properties to maximise the availability of accommodation.

Bed and breakfast

- 3.59 Our use of emergency bed and breakfast accommodation remains at a similar levels to last year with on the day presentations continuing to be an issue

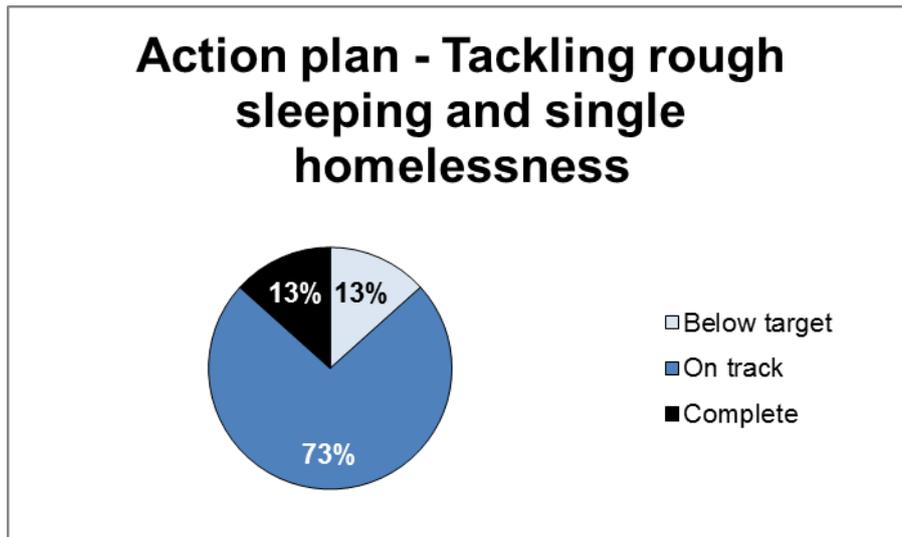
giving us no time to take any preventative action. This is also the case for other council's as well and there is now competition for available spaces.

- 3.60 Increasingly, we have to look outside of Guildford for bed and breakfast as most local proprietors target their business towards corporate and leisure clientele. Some of the local accommodation we could access does not offer cooking facilities for families and is not geared towards households with non-compliance issues and behaviour problems. Out of area placements are particularly common when households have more than two children.
- 3.61 Another challenge we face as a result of the numbers of on the day presentations is adherence to the The Homelessness: Suitability of Accommodation (England) Order 2003 which provides that bed and breakfast accommodation for households with children or a pregnant person will only be suitable for a maximum period of six weeks. If such households were accommodated for more than six weeks, the Council could be found to be acting unlawfully and subject to challenge by the courts or Local Government Ombudsman.
- 3.62 Avoiding the use of bed and breakfast is also a target of the Department of Communities and Local Government (DCLG) Gold Standard challenge that we are seeking to meet. Like the other Councils in Surrey, we need to find a balanced approach to meet this duty.
- 3.63 To reduce bed and breakfast use and manage costs we have implemented a range of initiatives. These include agreement to shorten the void turnaround time of our short term accommodation and providing floating support at tenancy start and again should the tenancy show signs of failing. We are also using some of our own general needs housing as temporary accommodation if there is no alternative. However, we are mindful that this can create a perverse incentive to make a homelessness application.
- 3.64 As there is generally a lack of accessible and affordable accommodation the number of bed and breakfast placements is unlikely to reduce in the short term.

Social Housing

- 3.65 The availability and use of existing social housing is an important aspect of our homelessness strategy. We do not give homeless households priority for social housing over applicants on the housing register, as this would create a perverse incentive to become homeless. Our recent Housing Allocation policy review has reinforced this principle, and will ensure that homeless households with a local connection are not disadvantaged compared to those with a lesser connection.
- 3.66 Key to preventing homelessness and addressing local housing need is to increase the supply of social housing, which is addressed through the wider Housing Strategy. The proposed strategy identifies the need to supply a range of provision including smaller units of accommodation, similar to those managed by Rosebery for those at risk of becoming homeless.
- 3.67 We also expect to see an increase in the number of affordable homes built over the next three years now that the economy is improving and the Council is in a position to build its own housing once again.

Tackling rough sleeping and single homelessness



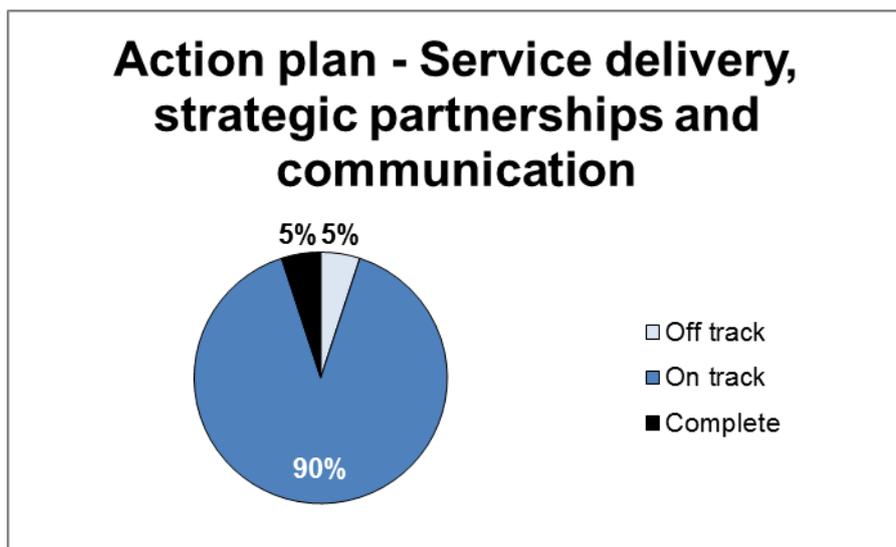
- 3.68 Rough sleeping continues to present us with challenges that we tackle by maintaining our strong partnerships with the town centre hostels and providers of other homelessness services. Rough sleepers are presenting with increasingly complex needs and pressure on funding to statutory services has resulted in raised eligibility thresholds. The voluntary sector, also having received funding cuts, is having to deal with increasingly complex cases .
- 3.69 HOST has made significant progress in developing effective arrangements with car parks, park rangers, environmental health, town rangers and police. This has enabled faster response times to reports of rough sleeping and a more coordinated approach to tackle the associated issues often presented by rough sleepers.
- 3.70 Changes to housing allocation policies introduced by other councils in Surrey and elsewhere have generally strengthened local connection criteria and this has resulted in rough sleepers and those at risk of homelessness having fewer options. They may no longer qualify to be on the housing register in their local area if they are no longer resident there. As accommodation providers respond to these changes and refuse to accept clients without local authority support this vulnerable group will have less access to accommodation and increasingly have no local connection to anywhere. We intend to negotiate through the Surrey Homeless Alliance to agree how we will approach this issue affecting the transient population in the county.
- 3.71 We have seen an increase in the number of individuals HOST is working with which is in line with the increase in Housing Options cases. In quarter 1 2014-15, HOST worked with 140 clients an increase of 27 people from the same period in 2013-14. Despite this increase in caseload, numbers of long stay and revolving door clients have reduced and short stay clients increased. This suggests that the collaborative working initiatives are generating positive outcomes and resources are being targeted effectively.
- 3.72 HOST has identified an increase in females at risk of or actually rough sleeping; from 43 (11.23 %t) in 2012-13 to 56 (18.5 %t) in 2013-14. April-September 2014-15 figures indicate that this increase is continuing; 51 females (24.1%t). This trend reflects the national picture and we recognise

the importance of keeping abreast of good practice developments specific to the needs of female rough sleepers.

- 3.73 Although highlighted in the strategy last year, we continue to face growing problems associated with use of New Psychoactive Substances (legal highs) and with at least four outlets in the town now selling these, the social and behavioural problems associated with this issue are likely to remain. Although awareness of this issue is increasing and there is concern across agencies there are limited options available. However we will continue to work with the police and other agencies.
- 3.74 Feedback from the stakeholder and client surveys shows that HOST continues to be a highly regarded asset to both groups. HOST continue to adapt practice and refine their operational procedures both internally and in partnership with others. An example of this is their partnership agreement with Number Five night shelter to allocate their bed spaces while the shelter closed during the day. This has resulted in Guildford cases being prioritised, increased the emphasis on reconnecting people without a local connection and improved risk management.
- 3.75 We are the lead authority for the 11 districts and boroughs that comprise the Surrey Homeless Alliance. This project has achieved increased access to rent deposits for single non priority homeless people, county wide implementation of Housing Options Wizards which offer online advice and signposting to people in housing need. We are supporting other areas to develop their own emergency accommodation and severe weather arrangements as this will reduce the demand on Guildford resources.

Service delivery, strategic partnerships and communications

- 3.76 The strategy also addresses aspects of service delivery, partnership working and communications.



- 3.77 We have recently had a small number of complex cases where we have found families intentionally homeless. Issues contributing to this situation include; continuous non-payment of rent, non-engagement with tenancy sustainment support and loss of accommodation and deposit due to tenancy

breaches. These cases are given numerous chances but run out of options. This is very difficult for all concerned and we are mindful of the impact on the children within such households. In such cases, we are required to notify children's services and continue to offer advice as necessary.

- 3.78 We are working in partnership with Woking and Waverley councils to achieve the DCLG Gold Standard for our service. We are currently carrying out peer reviews of each other's services identifying areas of good practice and highlighting areas for improvement.

4. Financial Implications

- 4.1 We have been fortunate that we have benefited from significant government funding to support our homelessness prevention work and have done so since 2003. Our homelessness prevention grant for 2014/15 is £347,420. This funds much of our core service as well as those we commission from voluntary sector providers to target the most vulnerable people in our community which make substantial contributions to homeless prevention agenda. This includes:

- Homeless Outreach and Support Team (HOST)
- CAB money advice services
- Employment, Training & Housing Options Support (ETHOS)

- 4.2 The homelessness prevention grant is now part of the Business Rate Retention Scheme (BRRS) but remains visible as a set amount. The DCLG have confirmed that the funding for homelessness prevention will continue to be identified separately within the BRRS and will be £346,590.01 in 2015-16. The grant is no longer ring fenced, but the DCLG hope that Councils will continue to use it for this purpose. We face an overall reduction in overall government grant income in future years so this funding will be subject to review as part of the wider budget process and continued use of all of the grant.

- 4.3 The current contract for HOST and service level agreements funding for ETHOS and the CABx run until the end of March 2015, we are seeking to continue this funding subject to the budget for next year being confirmed through the normal business planning process. These services play a key role in managing the impact of welfare reform and protecting the most vulnerable members of our community.

5. Legal Implications

- 5.1 The Homelessness Strategy, as a key housing strategy document, addresses our approach to prevention, provision of accommodation and the provision of support for those who become homeless.
- 5.2 We, together with Children's and Adult Social Services, are under a duty to take the content of the strategy into account when exercising our statutory functions. A failure to do so, where the strategy contains material relevant to the decision, may render a statutory decision unlawful.

6. Human Resource Implications

- 6.1 The implementation of strategy does not currently have any human resource implications, as we expect to be able to deliver the action plans within existing resources in Housing Advice and other relevant services. This may change during the life of the strategy and we will need to respond to budgetary, legislative and organisational changes.

7. Key risks

- 7.1 The shortage of affordable housing in conjunction with the various welfare reforms present the greatest risk to our ability to prevent homelessness as it reduces the options available for those on benefits or low incomes.
- 7.2 There are increasing numbers of people applying as homeless who cannot meet the shortfall in rent, which is not covered by housing benefit. This affects tenants in both the private rented sector and in the social housing sector as well, given the benefit cap and under occupation rules. Currently the impact is being mitigated by the use of DHP, however, should the amount of DHP grant we receive reduce to the levels prior to reform, which is likely, we will see a rise in rent arrears and possible evictions. This impacts on the Council as a landlord, but also our costs in meeting our statutory duties to the homeless.
- 7.3 The introduction of Universal Credit is now the next welfare reform challenge for the Council which is expected to roll out in Surrey in 2016. . There is little preparatory work we can do directly with customers until we are aware of the timetable, as our experience to date has shown us that many people do not believe the change will happen until it does. We consider that the two main issues for tenants will be the management of their money on a monthly rather than fortnightly basis and most importantly the prioritising of rent , which many tenants have not had to pay directly before, against other bills. Those who are unable to manage their monthly payment will be at a high risk of homelessness and are likely to be vulnerable.

The type of impact we could see is outlined below.

- Homelessness continues to increase and this will result in additional costs associated with the use of emergency accommodation.
- Difficulties in sourcing longer term temporary accommodation will increase the use of bed and breakfast hotels
- Breach of The Homelessness: Suitability of Accommodation (England) Order 2003 leading to challenge through the courts and referral to the Ombudsman
- Families having to move homes either within the area or outside the region if subject to benefit cap and cannot or will not get work.
- Larger families forced to move to smaller accommodation which will increase overcrowding
- Increased debt and rent arrears in the private sector leading to evictions and even greater reluctance from landlords to accommodate those in lower income thresholds
- Housing management risks in relation the rent arrears and poor income collection leading to eviction
- Increased risks to children and vulnerable adults due to having to move to cheaper areas with reduced support from family and friends

- Interest rates rise risk to the private sector landlords over repossession /deciding to sell, leading to a reduction in private lets.
- Having to use existing housing stock for the homeless thereby reducing access to others in housing need
- Access to the private rented sector reduced further due to the LHA not being in line with the market.
- Over reliance on short term housing association lets which are being blocked as little or no desire for families to move on.
- Proposals to further reduce the benefit cap and freeze benefits (including Housing Benefit) for two years leading to a further increase in households at risk of homelessness. .

8. Consultation

- 8.1 As part of this review, we consulted a range of key statutory and voluntary sector stakeholders. Our consultation methods included telephone and email questionnaires and a focus session.
- 8.2 A number of themes emerged from the feedback that support our experience, these are:
- lack of affordable private rented accommodation
 - lack of landlords willing to accept housing benefit
 - difficulty obtaining rent in advance
 - shared accommodation is not suitable for some people but is the only option for most under 35
 - statutory support is increasingly, time limited, which often does not meet clients' needs and can result in evictions
 - Clients with complex needs would benefit from a collaborative approach from support agencies
 - Lack of long term specialist support and housing services
 - Lack of move on accommodation for young people
 - Unaddressed rent arrears preventing access to accommodation
 - Anti-social behaviour arising from the use of New Psychoactive Substances (legal highs) causes problematic behaviour which impacts not only on the immediate environment but the wider community
 - Continue and enhance partnership working to improve the client experience.
- 8.3 We are able to address the feedback received using the existing action plans.

9. Suggested issues for overview and scrutiny

- 9.1 It is evident that our biggest challenge is the lack of appropriate accommodation available in the borough. To enable us to assist people affected by welfare reform and help meet local need we need to increase the supply of stable, good quality and affordable accommodation.
- 9.2 The Committee is asked to consider the following questions.
- Is our action plan progress satisfactory?
 - Do the action plans continue to be relevant and reflect the right priorities?
 - Could we do more to manage the impact of welfare change for those who are homeless or at risk of homelessness?

- Does it support the use of incentives to encourage private landlords to work with us?
- Does it have any other comments?

10. Conclusion

- 10.1 The Homelessness Strategy provides the direction for our services until 2018 and although we are successfully progressing our action plans, and officers are working with more customers, the risk of homelessness in the borough continues to grow. Welfare reform will continue to present major risks, both to our customers who will be under financial pressure and will find it harder to access housing, and to the Council due to increased demand for social housing and housing advice. There is also a risk that homelessness applications might increase and we will have a duty to house growing numbers of households without the corresponding accommodation being available. This could lead to increased expenditure on bed and breakfast accommodation.
- 10.2 We will need to be pro-active and resilient in addressing homelessness, seeking to work effectively with our partners and make the best use of our resources. Regular reviews of the action plans will ensure they remain relevant and reflect any changes in trends, or issues that we need to address. This will also provide clarity and guidance for our partners providing homelessness services in the borough.

11. Background Papers

Background paper 1 – Homelessness Strategy 2013-18

Background paper 2 – Welfare Reform – Impact and Service Review: One Year On

Background paper 3 – Housing Strategy 2015-2020 Consultation draft October 2014

12. Appendices

Appendix 1 Action plan progress

Appendix 2 Statistics

Appendix 3 Case studies