



REPORT OF:	Head of People and Welfare
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TO:	EXECUTIVE
DATE:	23 FEBRUARY 2017
EXECUTIVE MEMBER:	COUNCILLOR MRS R. RENTON

KEY DECISION REQUIRED:	YES
WARD (S) AFFECTED:	ALL

SUBJECT:	HOMELESSNESS REVIEW & STRATEGY 2017-21
<p>RECOMMENDATIONS:</p> <p>(i) That the Homelessness Review and Strategy 2017 -21, as set out at Annexes 1 and 2 of the report, be adopted; and</p> <p>(ii) That the Head of People & Welfare be authorised, in consultation with the Portfolio Holder with responsibility for Homelessness, to make minor amendments to the Review and Strategy document prior to its publication.</p>	
<p>REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS:</p> <p>To affirm the council's commitment to preventing homelessness in the borough through the provision of timely advice, assistance and support for households at risk as well as the exercise of the council's duties towards homeless households.</p> <p>To ensure homeless application decisions taken by officers are set within a legally compliant housing policy framework and avoid legal challenge.</p>	
<p>EXECUTIVE SUMMARY:</p> <p>The Homelessness Review and Strategy, attached at Annexes 1 and 2, set out the Council's ambitions to prevent and manage the social and financial impacts of homelessness in the borough.</p> <p>Legislation requires the publication of a new Strategy and Review every five years and this will be the Council's third Strategy. This is an opportunity to review our performance, identify the most effective initiatives and commit to new or enhanced services with the aim of preventing homelessness. The Strategy has been developed in the context of on-going public sector reform. Welfare reform will continue to pose challenges to affected households and the Homelessness Reduction Bill is expected to introduce fundamental changes to the operation of homelessness services in the next year.</p>	

This is a two-part document and includes a Homelessness Review. The Review contains detailed information about housing and homelessness in the borough. It includes data on the numbers of households seeking housing advice and assistance, levels and causes of homelessness, housing delivery, Housing Register including those assisted through it and information on the range of tools used to prevent homelessness. It has informed development of the Strategy.

The Homelessness Strategy identifies four objectives which are underpinned by a series of actions. Objective 1 is focused on preventing homelessness and sustaining tenancies through effective and timely advice, assistance and intervention. Objective 2 aims to increase the supply of private rented accommodation available to people at risk of homelessness to manage demand and offer a flexible, quick housing option.

Objective 3, working in partnership to minimise the impact of welfare reforms and increasing access to employment for people in housing need and at risk of homelessness is critical to assisting households to avoid the housing pressure associated with it. Finally, objective 4 aims to reduce the use of bed and breakfast accommodation. This underpins our priority to reduce expenditure on out of borough accommodation and operate local emergency accommodation.

Many of the initiatives can be delivered through existing staff and financial resources which include use of the section 106 affordable housing contributions. Opportunities to secure external government funding opportunities will be maximised where they support the Council's priorities.

The Homelessness Strategy 2017-21 is a step forward in tackling homelessness and improving the housing options and support available to people facing housing insecurity. It places the Housing Service in a strong position to tackle the challenges posed by a competitive housing market, welfare reform and proposed changes to homelessness legislation.

Executive has authority to approve the above recommendations

STATUTORY POWERS

1. The Council has a number of legal duties towards households at risk of becoming homeless and homeless households. These duties are enshrined in the Housing Act 1996, Homelessness Act 2002, Localism Act (2010) and Homelessness (Suitability of Accommodation) (England) Order 2012. In summary, the Council's duties are to give advice and assistance to households at risk of homelessness, to take applications from homeless households, to provide interim emergency accommodation pending a decision on priority need and intentionality.
2. The Homelessness Act (2002) requires local housing authorities to carry out a homelessness review and to formulate and publish a homelessness strategy based on the results of the review. A new strategy must be published every five years and the Council must take it into account when exercising its functions. The Council published the last strategy and review in 2012.

BACKGROUND

3. Sourcing affordable housing for an increasing number of households facing housing insecurity is a considerable challenge in the face of welfare reforms, rising house prices and private rents. Welfare reform has introduced a number of changes, and more will follow, that have affected access to housing and housing affordability. Local Housing Allowance (LHA) reductions and a freeze on increases of it have made it more challenging to source affordable private rentals for very low income households.
4. The introduction of the Total Benefit Cap, applied in two phases each setting a lower cap, has affected over 180 households and make their current housing unaffordable. From April 2019 single under 35s living in social rented accommodation will be subject to the Single Accommodation Rate local housing allowance (currently £79.55 - £82.46 per week).
5. The cost to the Council of providing emergency accommodation to homeless households has risen significantly over the last four years. In response to legislation limiting the placement of households with children in non self contained accommodation to no more than six weeks, households are placed in self contained accommodation in Croydon and other London areas. The cost of this accommodation is high and the Council is unable to recover the full costs through rental charges. In 2015/16 the net spend on B&B accommodation was over £560,000. The continued use of out of borough accommodation is financially unsustainable for the Council and is socially and economically unsustainable for households placed there.
6. Access to employment and financial awareness are recurrent themes connected to housing insecurity. The households most affected by welfare reform are those not in employment. However, we also know that many working households also struggle to afford housing costs. For many households a lack of financial awareness exacerbates their housing difficulty.
7. The Homelessness Reduction Bill has informed this Strategy. This Private Members Bill has Government support and marks the most significant change to homelessness legislation since the Housing Act 1996. It is expected to become legislation in Autumn 2017 or Spring 2018. Work is being undertaken to estimate the increased case load on the Service. Assessments of the financial impacts on the Council will follow as more details about the Bill are announced. Similar legislation was introduced in Wales and resulted in a 35% increase in case work undertaken.
8. This Homelessness Strategy aims to strike a balance between a number of issues. The main aim of the strategy is homelessness prevention and tenancy sustainment. It acknowledges the housing challenge facing many local residents accessing the local housing market to buy or rent or to secure an affordable rent home. It sets out a range of flexible options and tools to help households avoid homelessness and also aims to manage the financial impacts on the Council and prepares the ground for changes to be brought in through the Homelessness Reduction Bill.

KEY INFORMATION

Homelessness Review

9. The Review contains information about homelessness and housing in the borough over the previous five years and informs the priorities in the Strategy. It shows that many of our residents continue to experience housing pressure. Homeless

applications peaked in 2014/15 at 189 of which a housing duty was accepted for 139 households. The number has begun to decline as our focus has shifted to more intensive homelessness prevention work. In 2015-16 this had reduced to 148 decisions and 104 housing duty acceptances.

10. The main cause of homelessness during the last five years has been the loss of private rented accommodation (30%), followed closely by parental evictions (22%) and then friend / relative evictions (14%). Reported cases of domestic violence have increased and homelessness due to a violent relationship breakdown with a partner accounted for 9%. The majority of accepted households continue to be those with children, with lone parent households represent just over half of households owed a duty.
11. Over 1,200 households were assisted to avoid homelessness during 2011-16. The majority were assisted into alternative accommodation and over a quarter were able to keep their accommodation as a result of landlord negotiation and tenant support. Many of the households assisted into alternative accommodation moved to private rented housing.
12. A range of 'tools' have been used to assist households at risk of homelessness over the last five years. They range from support and advice, tenancy sustainment activities assisting households to manage tenancies and household finances. We also make referrals to specialist organisations including the CAB and Community Debt Advice, to tenancy support providers such as Parashoot and Transform, to the supported housing providers Transform Housing & Support, YMCA East Surrey, Sanctuary, Wayside Hostel, the Renewed Hope Trust winter night shelter, the NextStep Rent Deposit Guarantee Scheme, as well as other teams and organisations such as the Family Support Team, foodbanks and charities.
13. Our 'tools' also include direct financial assistance. We work in partnership with the Benefits Team to administer the Discretionary Housing Fund which provides payments for private sector rent in advance, deposits and bridging short-term affordability gaps. We use the Repossession Prevention Fund to offer rent in advance, deposits, payment of arrears, garden clearance and rubbish clearance and other things to avoid eviction or set up a tenancy. We offer single homeless households £500 towards a deposit. Housing Services will also act as rent guarantors for a small number of households with a good financial record able to source private rented but unable to secure it without a rent guarantor.
14. What is clear from the Review is that there is no single solution to homelessness prevention. Households benefit from one or more 'tools' and interventions. Many of the tools used over the last five years continue to be effective and we will focus additional resources on the most effective ones such as tenancy sustainment, the NextStep Rent Deposit Scheme, raising financial awareness and providing borough based emergency accommodation.

Homelessness Strategy Objectives

15. The Homelessness Strategy sets out four objectives. Each objective has a number of priority actions. The priority actions are detailed in an action plan which accompanies the Strategy.
16. **Objective 1: Prevent homelessness and sustain tenancies** - providing an effective housing options prevention service giving access to advice, information and assistance underpins this objective. Our homelessness prevention success rate is

linked to contact and interventions at the earliest point of housing difficulty. More capacity has been made available in the team to undertake tenancy sustainment activities including landlord liaison, tenancy support and basic money advice. To maintain this success we need to ensure clients are able to access support services to put them in the best position to secure accommodation or to sustain their tenancies into the future. Effective partnerships with support providers are essential to safeguard services.

17. Increasing numbers of domestic abuse victims are approaching for advice, help and assistance. We provide practical advice and assistance and refer to other agencies as appropriate. We need to monitor the number of enquiries from victims of domestic abuse, ensuring our team are trained to recognise and respond appropriately to victims.
18. More single people are experiencing housing difficulties and facing street homelessness. Many are affected by high housing costs, others have issues associated with relationship breakdowns, mental health difficulties, drug or alcohol problems. A range of organisations support single people with accommodation, advocacy, food, advice and support. We aim to continue supporting the local 'no second night' scheme which assists homeless people off the street and will explore opportunities for more housing options for people facing street homelessness.
19. **Objective 2: Increase the supply of private rented accommodation available to people at risk of homelessness** - the availability of and access to private rented housing is crucial to managing demand and preventing homelessness. There is a balancing act between accessing this tenure to prevent homelessness and managing homelessness from this sector. However, we cannot rely on a sufficient supply of affordable / social rented homes for everyone who is at risk of homelessness and private renting offers a flexible housing option to those who cannot afford to buy, need a quick housing solution or face a long wait for social housing. Our priority is to expand and enhance the current rent deposit bond scheme so more households can be assisted to avoid homelessness which in turn reduces pressure on bed & breakfast (B&B) usage. Our Rent Guarantor Scheme will also continue to offer financial support to selected households to enable them to secure private accommodation when the only barrier is a lack of guarantor.
20. **Objective 3: Work in partnership to minimise the impact of welfare reform on our residents and increase access to employment for people in housing need and at risk of homelessness** – access to employment is critical for households facing the impacts of welfare reform and high housing costs. Our priority is to deliver a multi-agency response to residents affected to prevent homelessness. This aims to get more households working, to support them to manage their housing costs and to budget effectively. The second Total Benefit Cap implemented in November 2016 had an immediate impact on housing affordability and will continue to impact on households who become subject to the cap in the future.
21. Overcoming the barriers to work is essential and the East Surrey Pathway Project will target those individuals experiencing housing insecurity who are furthest from work. The implementation of Universal Credit, a single streamlined benefit paid to households which includes housing costs, poses a number of challenges that we need to be prepared for to avoid increased homelessness as a result of rent arrears. Poor financial awareness underpins many housing problems. Taking a joined up approach to improving financial awareness and providing money advice are essential to reduce the risk of homelessness.

22. **Objective 4: Reduce the use of bed and breakfast accommodation** - our priorities are two-fold to use private rented accommodation to discharge our duty and to develop local emergency accommodation. It is not financially sustainable for the Council to rely on this type of accommodation nor is it socially or economically sustainable for the households placed in out of borough accommodation. We intend to assist more households owed a homelessness duty into suitable private rented accommodation by discharging our duty into suitable accommodation. This will reduce the numbers living in temporary accommodation and provide a housing solution. Households can still apply to the Housing Register and bid through the choice based lettings system for a social housing tenancy. The enhanced rent deposit scheme will assist us to deliver this approach.
23. To reduce the use of out of borough B&Bs we intend to use developer contributions to deliver some 25 units of temporary accommodation in the borough over the lifetime of the strategy. This will reduce expenditure on B&B accommodation. Importantly, it will enable us and our partners to provide more effective support to be given to homeless households based locally.

OPTIONS

24. The following options have been identified as being available to the Executive:
25. Option 1: Agree the publication of the Homelessness Review and Strategy 2017-21 at Annex 1 and Annex 2. This option would support the Housing Service to continue to develop its approach to homelessness prevention and implement a number of initiatives to support households at risk of homelessness. It will also mean that homelessness decisions continue to be robust and at reduced risk of legal challenge. This option is recommended to ensure the Council continues to tackle the causes and effects of homelessness and reduces expenditure on B&Bs.
26. Option 2: Do not agree the Homelessness Review and Strategy 2017-21 for publication. This option would mean the council would be in breach of the Homelessness Act 2002. This would have negative implications on homeless application decisions taken by the council. This option is not recommended because it would reduce the effectiveness of the housing service.

LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

27. The Homelessness Act 2002 places a requirement on Councils to publish a new Homelessness Review and Strategy every five years. The current strategy expires in February 2017. As stated above, the Council must take account of the Homelessness Strategy when exercising its functions. This means if the Council does not have a current Homelessness Strategy all homelessness application decisions made from the date of expiry of the strategy and decisions taken in the context of the Housing Register and Allocations Policy will be vulnerable to successful legal challenge. The Executive has the powers to agree the Homelessness Review and Strategy for publication.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

28. There are no specific financial implications arising from publication of the Homelessness Strategy. Many of the priority actions in the Homelessness Strategy can be delivered within existing staffing and financial resources including revenue and capital budgets. Team re-organisation and initiatives to reduce time spent by

them on routine housing queries has released capacity in the team to focus on homelessness prevention work.

EQUALITIES IMPLICATIONS

29. An Equalities Impact Assessment (EIA) screening has been undertaken.
30. The EIA screening is available on the Council's website www.reigate-banstead.gov.uk. It identifies no negative equalities impacts and identifies positive impacts in relation to: younger people and children, disability, women, men, pregnancy and maternity.

COMMUNICATION IMPLICATIONS

31. Following agreement by the Executive to publish them, the Homelessness Review and Strategy will be made available on the Council's website. Our stakeholders will also be notified of publication.

RISK MANAGEMENT CONSIDERATIONS

32. The Council's Operational Risk Register identifies a number of risks around homelessness. These include increased demand for temporary accommodation, increased use of B&Bs and associated expenditure and the impacts of welfare reforms on homelessness. Mitigating action has been implemented and the risks are being managed effectively. The objective and actions in this Homelessness Strategy will support ongoing risk management.
33. Section 26 above outlines the legal implications of not publishing a new Review and Strategy on the functions of the Housing Service. The Council would be in breach of legislation and more vulnerable to legal challenge of housing decisions. Importantly, the Housing Service would not have a published Strategy setting out the way forward for managing homelessness and working with partners.

OTHER IMPLICATIONS

34. There are no other implications arising from this project.

CONSULTATION

35. Consultation on this report has been carried out with the Council's Legal Services and Finance Teams.
36. In preparing for the Homelessness Strategy a range of informal and formal consultation has been undertaken. This has included the following activities:
 - a. Informal consultation with Members undertaken on the main objectives of the Strategy, this has included Executive Members at the Leader's Meeting, a Member Briefing Workshop and information item on the Member's website
 - b. Consultation with stakeholders in workshops
 - c. Consultation with internal staff in various teams in a workshop
 - d. Formal consultation through an on-line survey on the Council's website
 - e. Formal consultation with Overview & Scrutiny Committee

37. Early consultation with stakeholders has helped to shape the priorities and direction of the Strategy objectives. It has highlighted activities that are valued and that have a positive impact on households experiencing housing insecurity these include the importance of earlier interventions to avoid homelessness, money advice and the continued need for supported housing options.
38. The on-line survey attracted 12 responses from seven organisations. A consultation report has been produced outlining the detail of the consultation undertaken, responses and how the Strategy has been influenced. Overall there was support for the objectives of the strategy. There was very strong support for the East Surrey Outreach Service for rough sleepers, money advice services and for the Council developing its own emergency accommodation in the borough.
39. There was strong support for increased use of the private rented sector to prevent homelessness and discharge the homelessness duty although some concerns were raised. Concerns included a strong emphasis on use of private rented housing rather than affordable housing, the high rent levels, the issue of evictions from this sector as a cause of homelessness and the need to emphasise affordable housing more.
40. The concerns are acknowledged and already highlighted in the Homelessness Review and Strategy. The Review includes detailed information on new affordable housing delivery in the borough, the numbers of applicants on the Housing Register, supply of re-let social housing units and rental costs in all tenures. The Strategy aims to strike a balance between maximising the supply of new housing and re-lets and using the private rented sector. The Strategy now more clearly acknowledges there is a tension at times between the priority to increase use of private rented housing and homelessness from this sector. However, the benefits of access to the private rented sector outweigh the negatives. Private rented housing is a realistic option for many households and is one of several tools used to avoid homelessness.
41. Respondents felt our response to the impact of lower benefit cap and emphasis on income, employment and money advice was not enough to prevent homelessness given the context of rising rents and the complexity of some households needs. Suggestions included the need for more social rented housing, early intervention and support to help households manage their lives and tenancies. We acknowledge that there no single response to managing the impacts of welfare reform and have included an emphasis on ongoing support for households in the final strategy.

POLICY FRAMEWORK

42. The Homelessness Strategy sets out the Council's plans to prevent homelessness and reduce reliance on B&B accommodation. It supports the objective of reducing the Housing Service's expenditure on the provision of temporary accommodation. It builds on the temporary accommodation project through which the Council has acquired eight homes and will deliver a further 10-12 temporary accommodation units.

Background Papers:

1. Homelessness Review
2. Homelessness Strategy 2017-21
3. Action Plan 2017-21
4. Consultation Statement

Executive
23 February 2017

Agenda Item: 4 Annex 1
Homelessness Review and
Strategy 2017-21



Homelessness Review

Homelessness Strategy 2017-2021

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Introduction

Reviewing homelessness in the borough during the last 5 years and the issues which surround it allows the Council to identify and understand the trends in homelessness. Furthermore, it enables the Council to evaluate its services ensuring it meets the demands around homelessness, tenancy support and general housing advice.

Reigate and Banstead: Borough profile

Population

Reigate and Banstead is located in East Surrey bordering the boroughs of Croydon, Sutton, Crawley and the districts of Mole Valley and Tandridge. It has the highest population in Surrey of approximately 138,000 people. The population is expected to grow to 176,000 by 2037 as projected by the 2010 ONS. An increase to the over-65 population has also been predicted from the current proportion of 16% to 23% in 2035. At 85% the main ethnicity of the borough is White British, followed by 9.4% of non-white ethnic groups and 5.6% of all other white ethnicities. This is reflected in the statistics of homeless acceptances between 2011-2016, in which 82% have been of a white ethnicity.



Employment

Reigate and Banstead is the 3rd highest economically active local authority in Surrey. A total of 75.2% of the population aged 16-74 are economically active. The 80.7% of economically active males aged 16-74 exceed both the Surrey average of 79.7% and national average of 75.2%. Similarly, the 69.9% of economically active females aged between 16-74 also exceed the Surrey average of 67.7% and national average of 64.7%, ranking 2nd highest in the whole of Surrey (Census 2011). As of 2016 the borough had a Job Seekers Allowance claimant level of 0.6%, ranking 10th lowest out of the other 11 Surrey local authorities and 6.9% of the population aged 16-64 claim working age benefits.

Deprivation

As Reigate and Banstead is generally a thriving borough deprivation is not a significant issue. The borough falls just outside of the least 10% deprived in the country however within Surrey it is ranked as the 4th most deprived. Deprivation exists in pockets in the areas of Preston, Merstham, Redhill, Woodhatch and western areas of Horley. According to 2010 statistics released by the Department of Energy and Climate Change, 10.4% of households experience fuel poverty; however this is below the Surrey average of 10.6% and considerably lower than the national average of 18.4%.

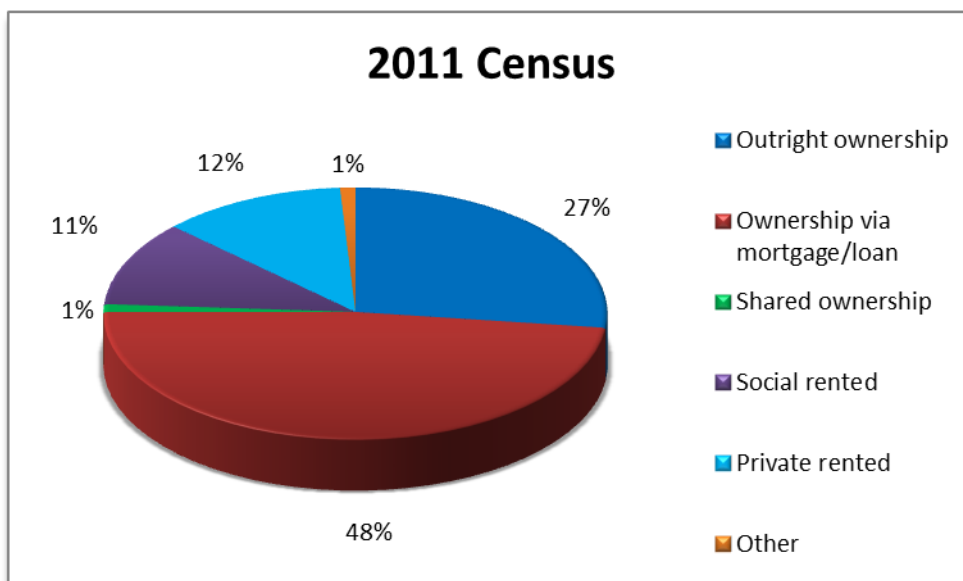


Tenure and Housing Costs



Not only does this borough have over 55,400 households, the highest in Surrey, it also has the most properties of all the Surrey councils. Data collected in the 2011 Census states that there has been a 5% increase in private rented tenancies and a 6% decrease in outright home ownership.

The graph below illustrates that the majority of households in the borough own their homes through mortgages / loans followed by outright ownership. The divide between social housing renting and private sector renting is fairly balanced. In comparison to the national average, Reigate and Banstead has a higher proportion of home ownership and a lower proportion of both private sector and social rented accommodation.



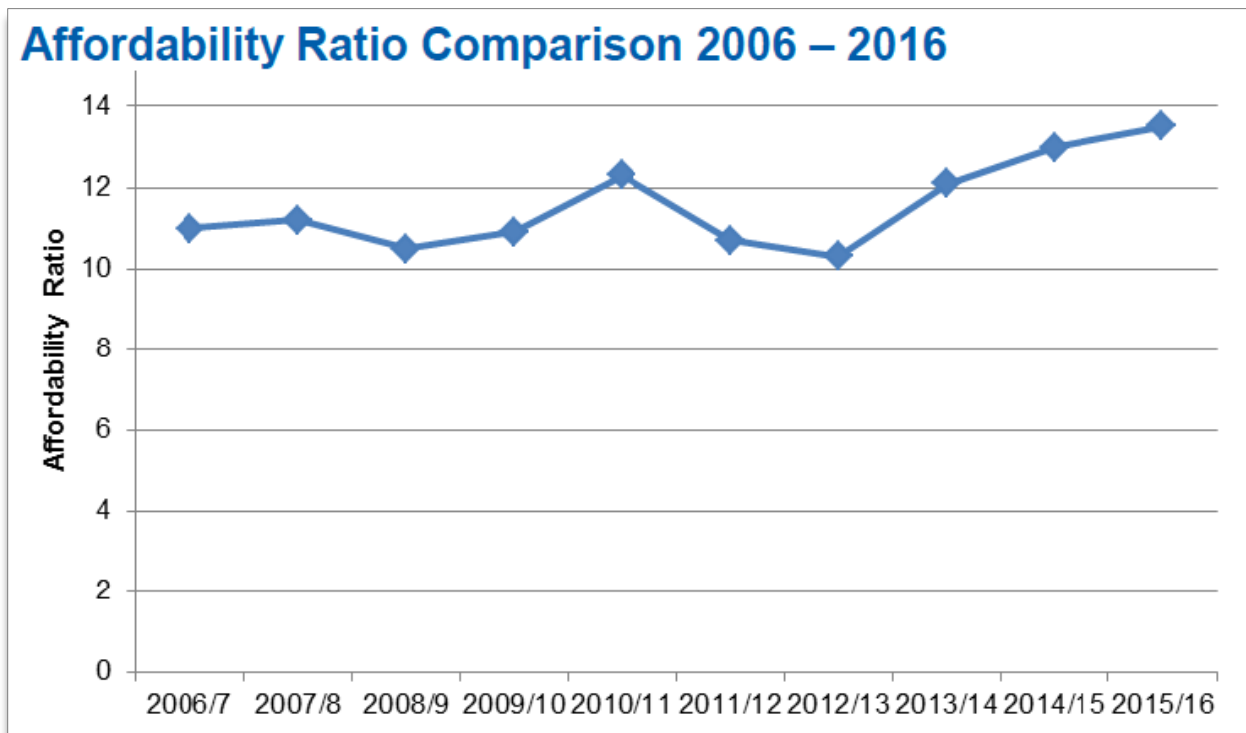
The Land Registry (March 2016) has reported that average house prices have increased from £404,000 to £447,000. This 10% increase is in line with the national trends reported by Halifax.

The table below shows the increases in the average house prices for all types of properties since March 2016. Flats and semi-detached properties have seen the highest increase whereas detached and terraced property prices have had a lower yet equal increase. This may reflect the demand for lower priced entry level housing.

Type	% of increase	Average price
Flat	15%	£252,000
Semi-detached	11%	£423,364
Detached	6%	£730,106
Terraced	6%	£356,724

Affordability has also been a significant challenge facing the housing market, increasing from 13.0 in March 2015 to 13.5 in March 2016. The graph below shows that since 2012/13, the affordability ratio has started to increase again after it began to fall in 2010/11, which reflects the wider economic picture. Reigate and Banstead is still the third most affordable borough out of the other

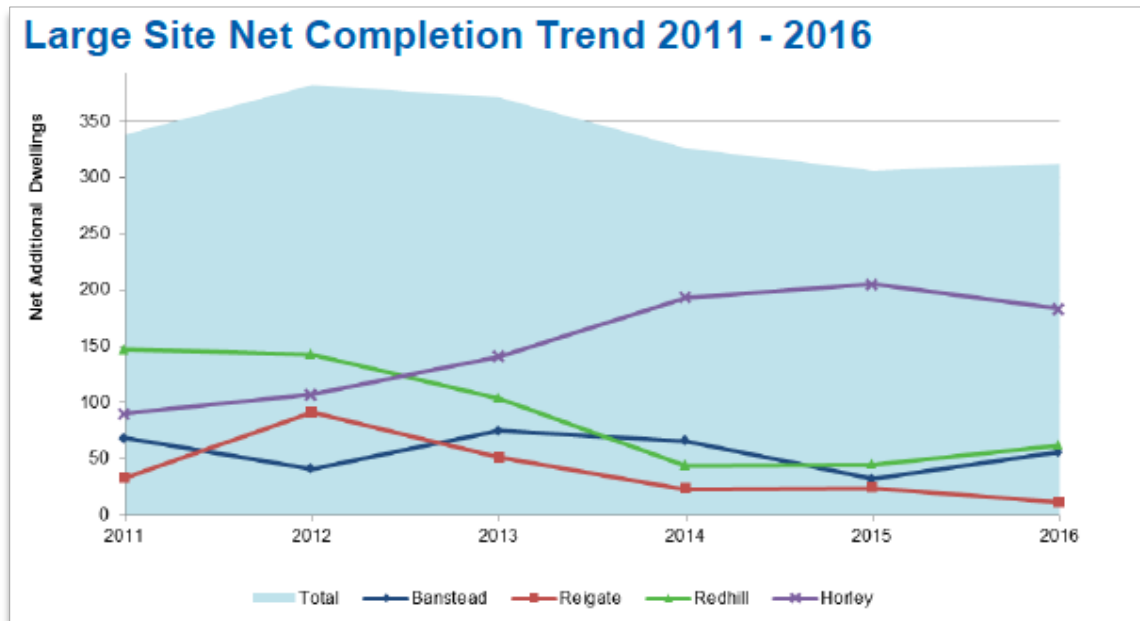
Surrey
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New Housing Delivery

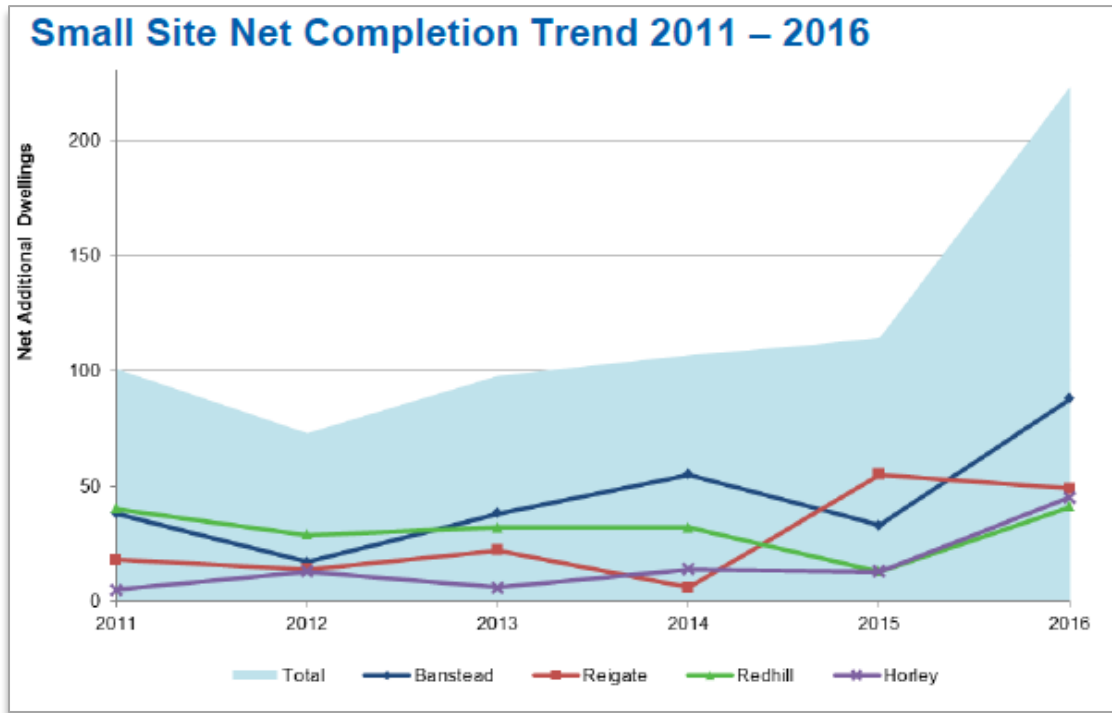
There have been a total of 1856 net housing completions from 2012 to 2016, 535 of which were completed in the last financial year which is a 27% increase from 2014/15.

The graph below shows that since 2011, the majority of completions have been in Horley (37%) and Redhill (27%). However, there has been a general decline in large site completions (sites over 10 units) over the past few years. In 2014/15, 73% of completions were on large sites however this reduced to 58% in 2015/16.



Source: Housing Monitor 2016

Nevertheless, there has been a significant increase in small site completions (sites less than 10 units). In 2014/15, 27% of completions were on small sites which increased to 42% in 2015/16. During the last 5 years, Horley had the greatest increase, 167%, of dwellings on small sites followed by a 100% increase in Banstead. However, there has been a 31% fall in Reigate.



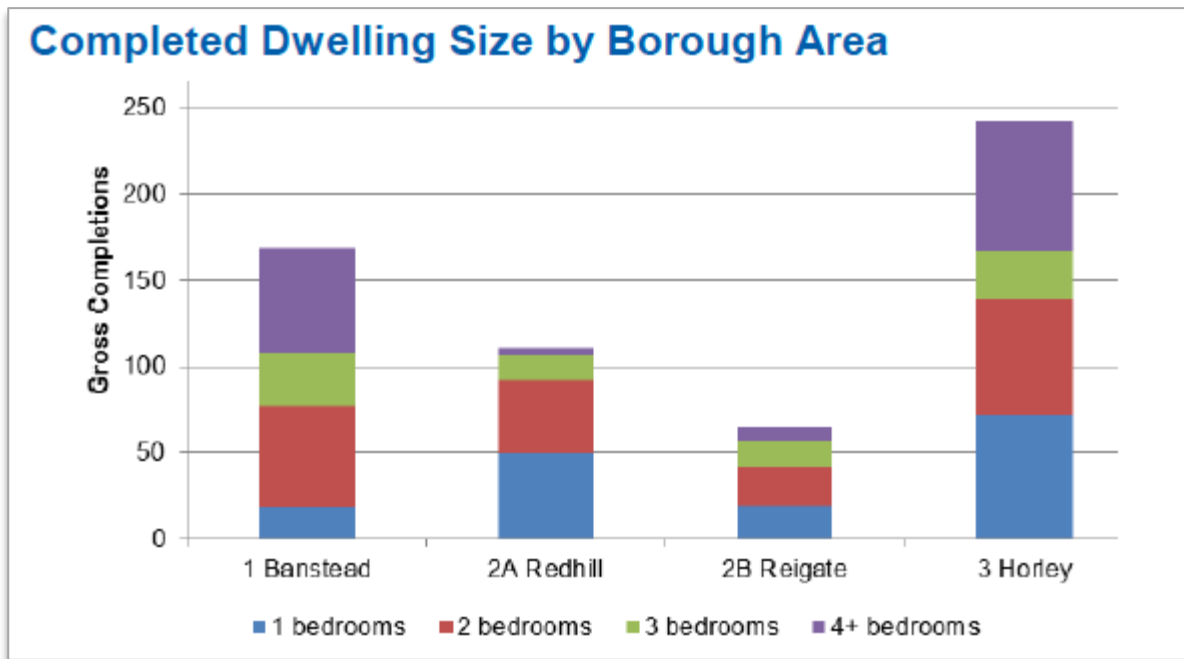
Source: Housing Monitor 2016

There has been an even split of the types of dwelling (houses and flats) completed in the borough during the last financial year. However the split varies by borough area. The table below shows Redhill has the largest proportion of flat completions, Banstead the highest proportion of houses and Horley has an almost even split in 2015/16:

Area	Flats	Houses
Banstead	32.5%	67.5%
Redhill	76.6%	23.4%
Reigate	56.9%	43.1%
Horley	48.3%	51.7%

Source: Housing Monitor 2016

The Strategic Housing Market Assessment 2012 Housing Market Recommendations advised 40% of new dwellings should be 1 – 2 bedroom dwellings and 60% 3 bedrooms or more. In 2015/16 a total of 60% of completed homes were 1 and 2 bedroom properties and 40% of completions were 3 and 4+ bedrooms.

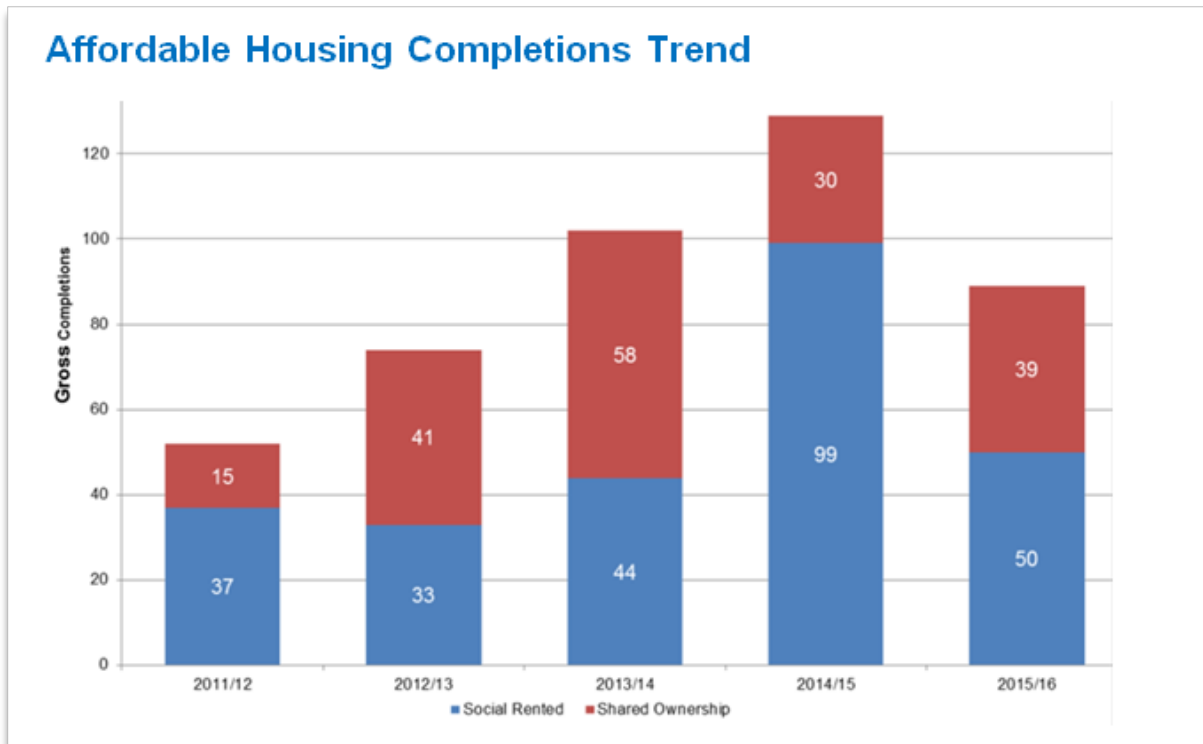


Source: Housing Monitor 2016

The table above shows the variation of completed dwelling size by borough area during 2015/16. Redhill and Horley have the highest number of completed 1 and 2 bedroom properties whereas Banstead and Horley have the greatest number of completed 3 and 4+ bedroom properties completions. This trend continues from the previous year.

Affordable housing

The Council's Core Strategy aims to enable the provision of 1,500 affordable homes between 2012 and 2027 equating to an average target of delivering 100 dwellings per annum. In 2015/16 89 affordable units were completed making up 15% of all gross completions. This is a reduction from the previous year where affordable unit completions made up 28.5% of all gross completions. There was been an increase in the number of social rented dwellings with 50 of the 89 dwellings a social rented tenure. The graph below shows that a total of 446 affordable units have been completed since 2011/12. The number of affordable housing completions had been increasing since 2011/12, however in 2015/16 the numbers decreased.



Source: Housing Monitor 2016

Rents

There is a great variance between social, affordable and private rent asking prices in the borough. The table below shows that the charges for privately renting are considerably higher when compared to both social and affordable rents.

Average local rent prices August 2016 (per calendar month)

No of bedrooms	Social rent	Affordable rent	Private rent
Studio	£402.22	£529.75	N/A
1 bed	£500.72	£536.81	£841
2 bed	£615.51	£862.33	£1,114
3 bed	£603.72	£1,030.29	£1,368
4 bed	£607.19	unavailable	£1,818

Source: Zoopla

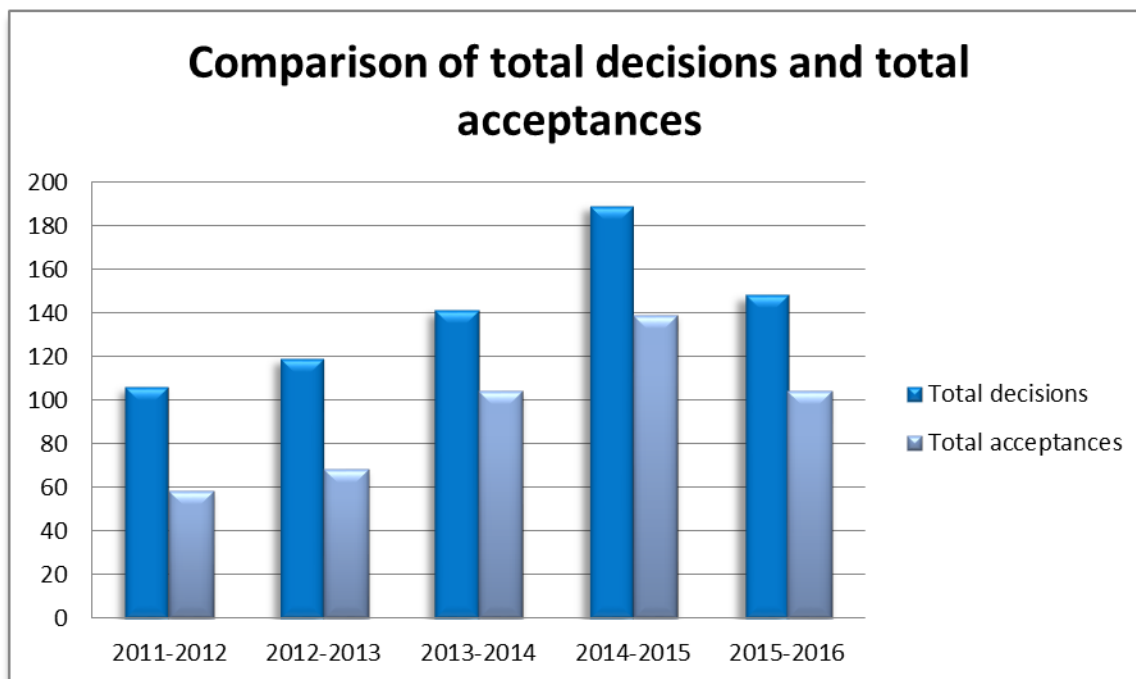
Although the borough still has many social rented properties, a significant number of new builds are set at affordable rent rates. Affordable rents are typically higher and the difference increases with the size of property. For example, it would cost clients £246.82 more each month to rent a 2 bedroom affordable rented property compared to renting a 2 bedroom social rented property. This has triggered the need for assessments of affordability for clients nominated to affordable rent homes. The affordability of social housing is becoming a common issue for households and in response the Council will begin undertaking more detailed financial checks of each new applicant joining the Housing Register. We will offer advice and guidance to help with income and affordability to ensure clients are in the best financial position when offered a tenancy.

Trends in homelessness

This section explores the number of homeless applications investigated during 2011-2016. It presents data about the households the Council accepted a duty to accommodate including total numbers, ethnicity, age, type, gender, the main causes and the main priority categories.

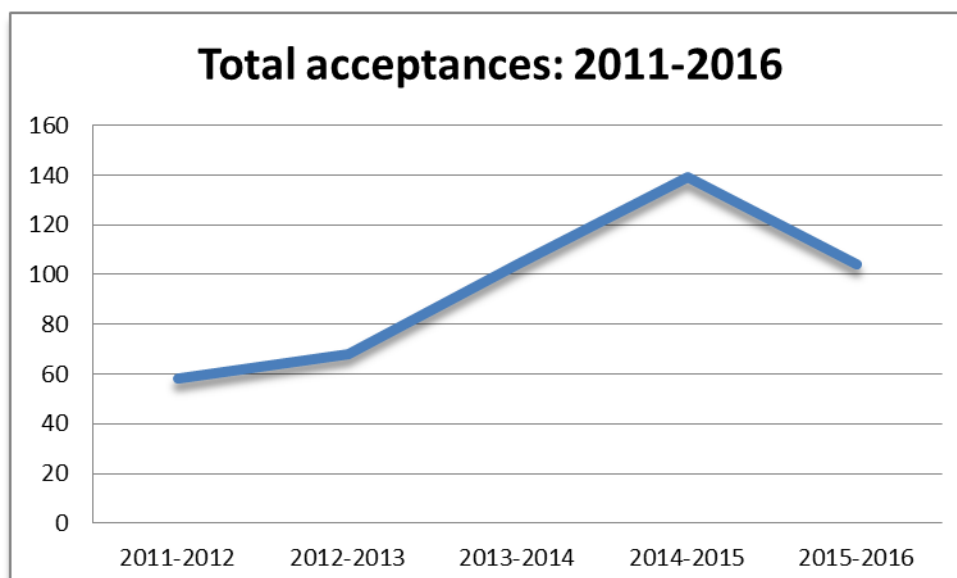
Homeless applications

The Council investigated 703 homelessness applications between 2011/2012 and 2015/2016.



Source: P1E

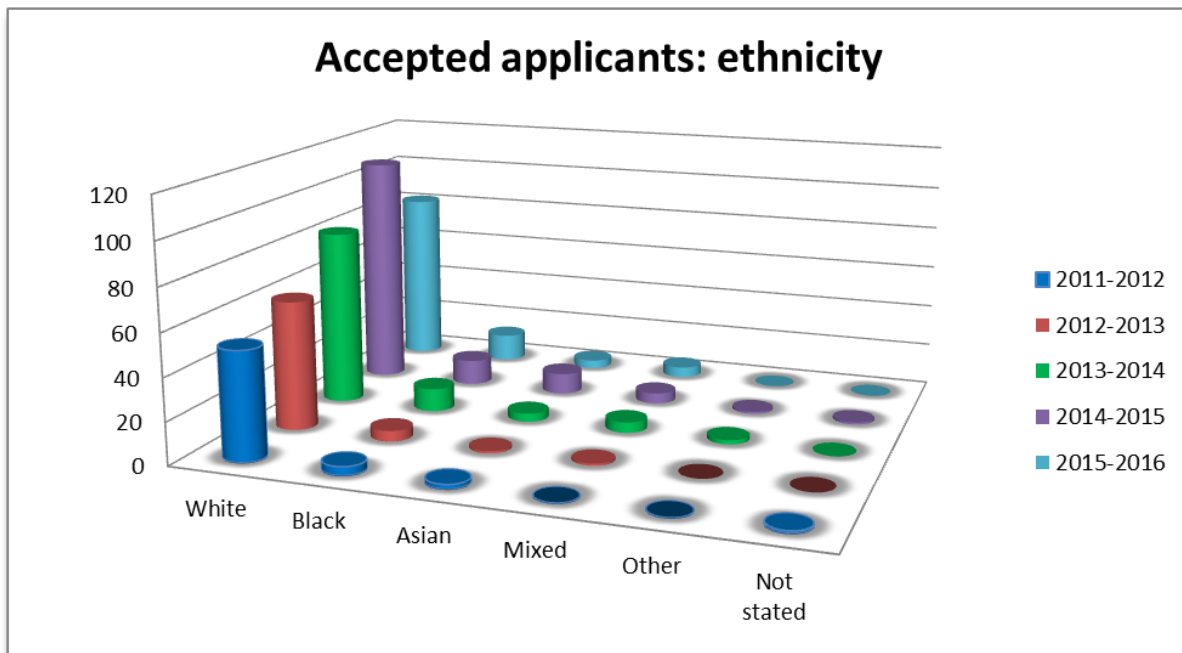
The graph above shows that both decisions and acceptances increased each financial year, reaching its peak in 2014-2015 with 189 decisions and 139 acceptances, but then both dropped to 148 decisions and 104 acceptances at the end of 2015-2016.



After a steep increase from 2012-2013, the last financial year saw a decline in homelessness acceptances.

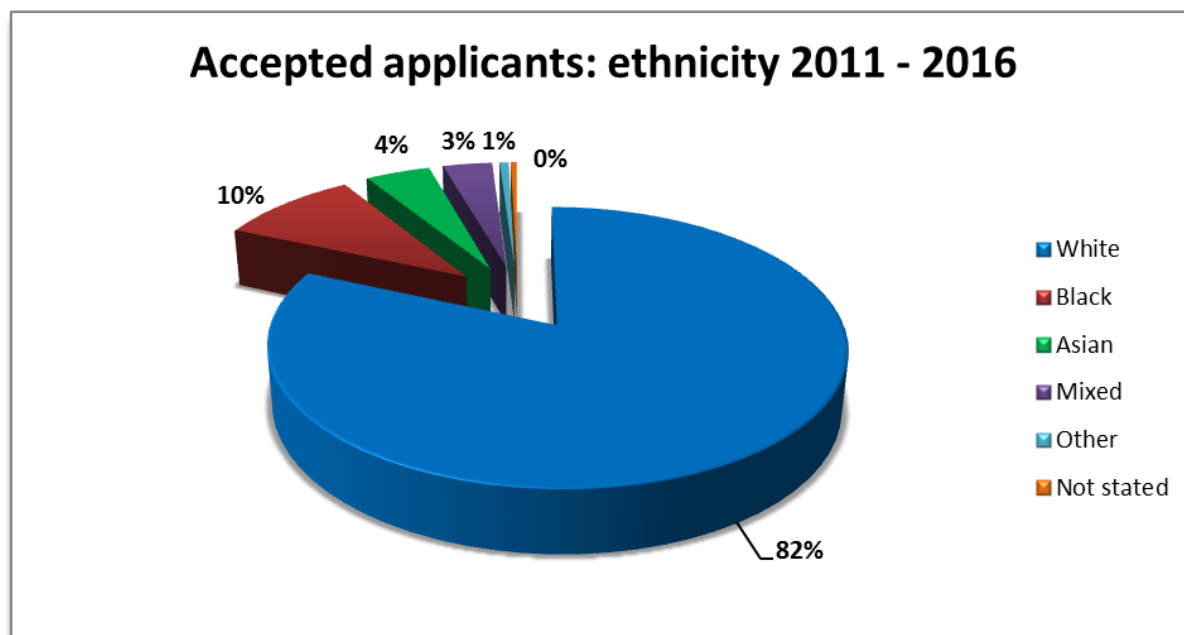
Homeless and ethnicity

The Council monitors the ethnicity of all households that make a homeless approach.



Source: P1E

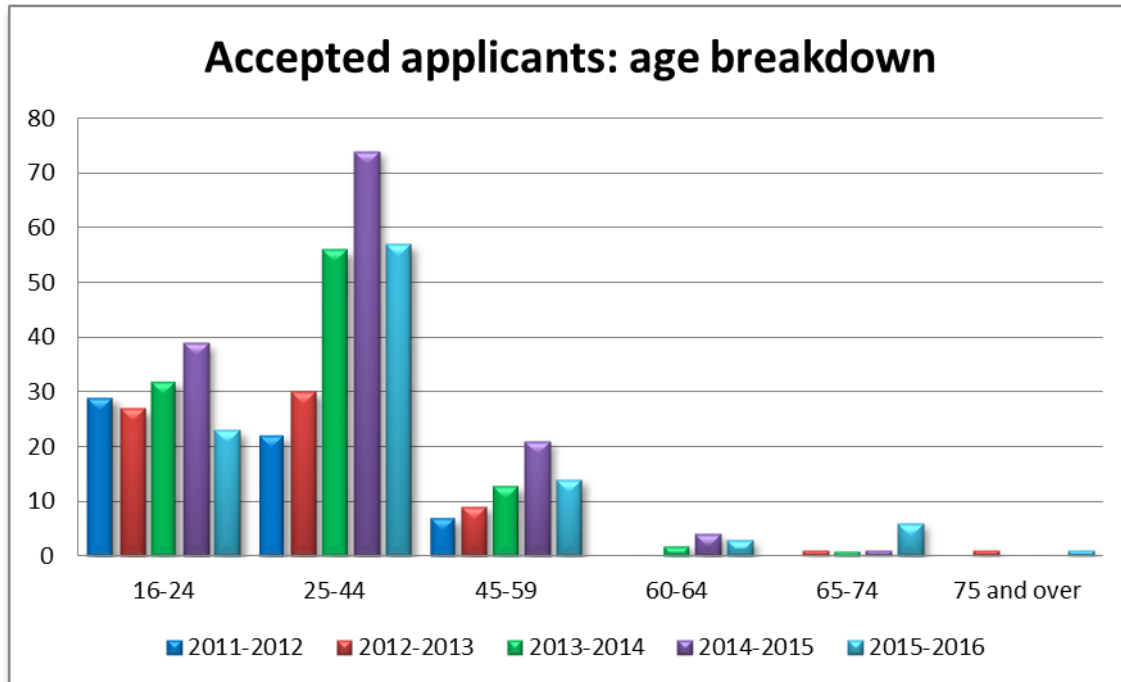
There has been a steady increase in accepted households from a Black, Asian and Mixed backgrounds alongside a continuous rise of White ethnic households.



Source: P1E

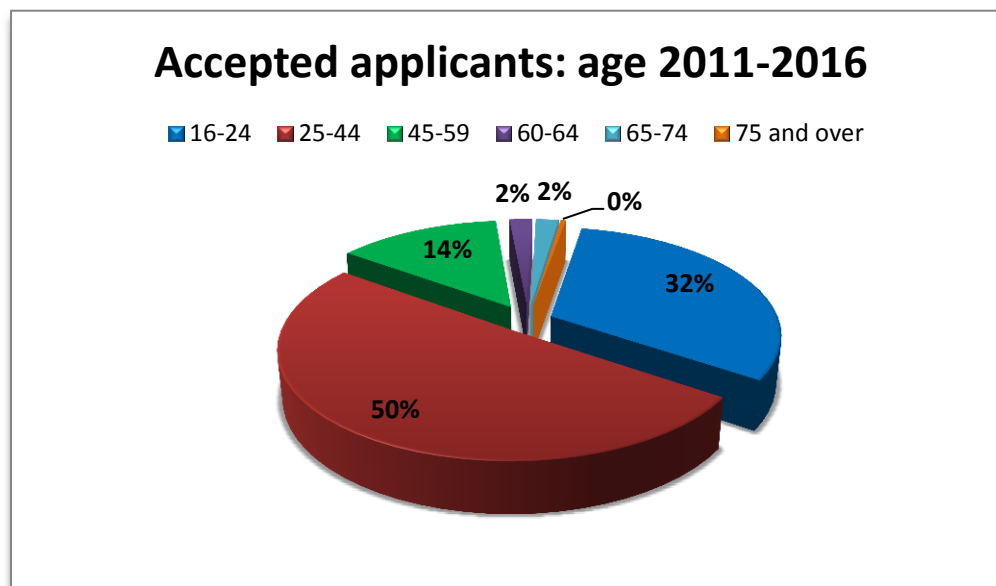
There has been a 7% decrease of White accepted applicants since the last Homeless Strategy, however it remains the dominant ethnic category reflecting the 90.6% White population of the borough (Census 2011). The population of all other ethnic minorities in the borough total to 9.4% which indicates that the accepted households from all other ethnic minorities are overrepresented as the percentage almost doubles at 18%. However the data for the Census was collected in 2011, therefore the ethnic structure may have since changed.

Homelessness and age



Source: P1E

The 25-44 age group is the most common age group of all homeless households and has increased significantly since 2012. There has also been a noticeable increase in the 45-59 age group too.

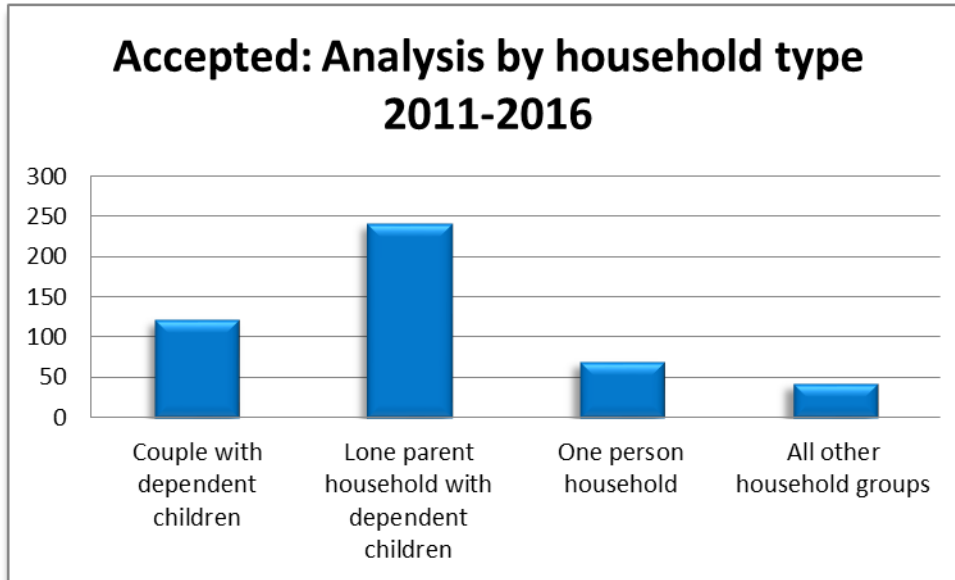


Source: P1E

Half of all accepted applicants in 2011-2016 have been from the 25-44 age group closely followed by the 16-24 group. This shows that homelessness tends to affect the younger population of the borough. The over 60 age group forms a smaller proportion of accepted households.

Homelessness and household types

Analysing the breakdown of household types is an important factor when assessing homelessness within the borough, understanding causes and initiatives to prevent it.

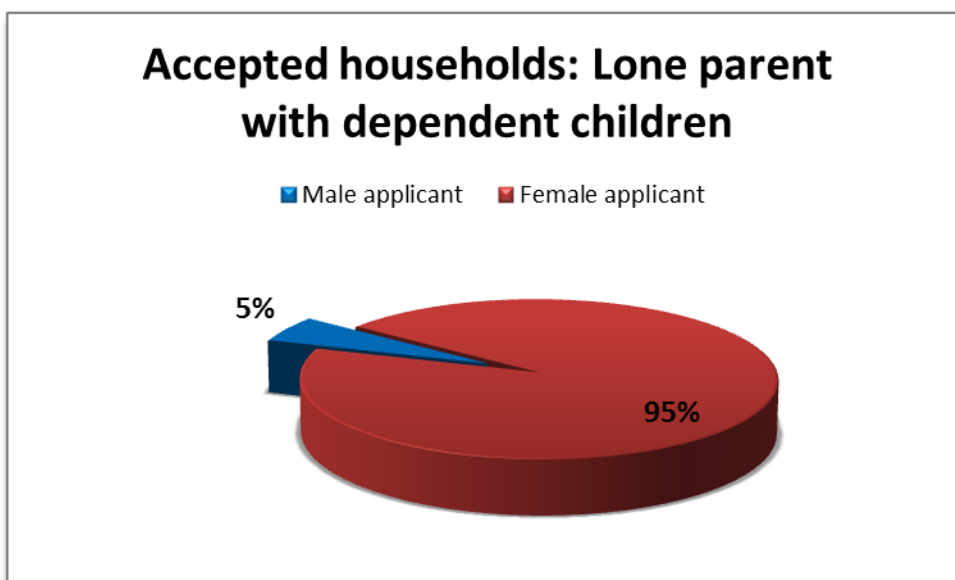


Within the borough lone parent with dependent children represent just over half of all accepted homeless applicants. The graph (right) also reveals that over 75% of all accepted homeless households have dependent children.

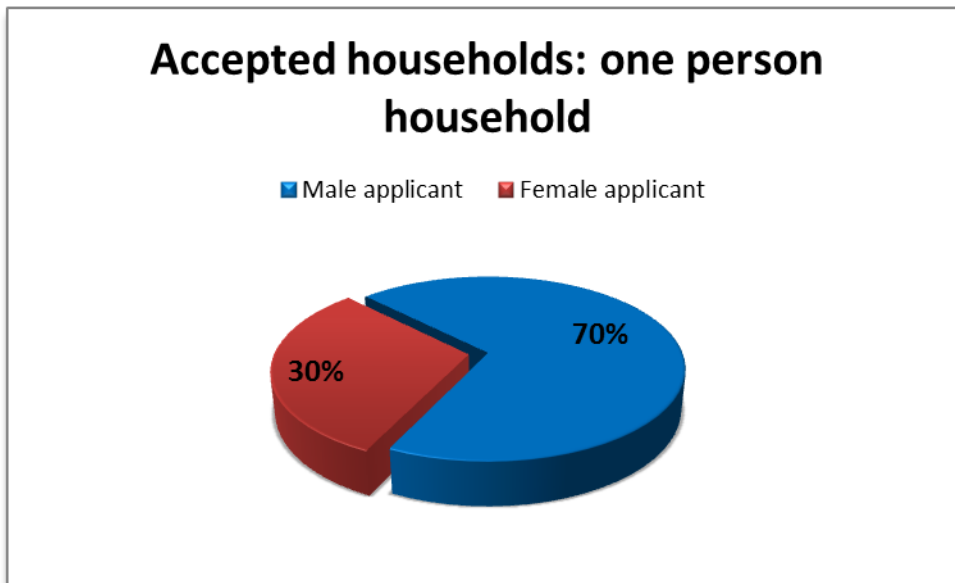
Source: P1E

Household type: gender breakdown

Both graphs below highlight the common gender themes amongst particular types of households. The lone parents with dependent children category is dominated by female applicants in a complete contrast to the predominance of male applicants in one person homeless households.



Source: P1E



Source: P1E

Causes of homelessness

There are various reasons why households become threatened with homelessness or are made homeless.

In the previous Homelessness Strategy there were no particular trends in the causes of homelessness. However the last 5 financial years have seen the development of 4 main causes of homelessness which categorise 75% of all accepted households.

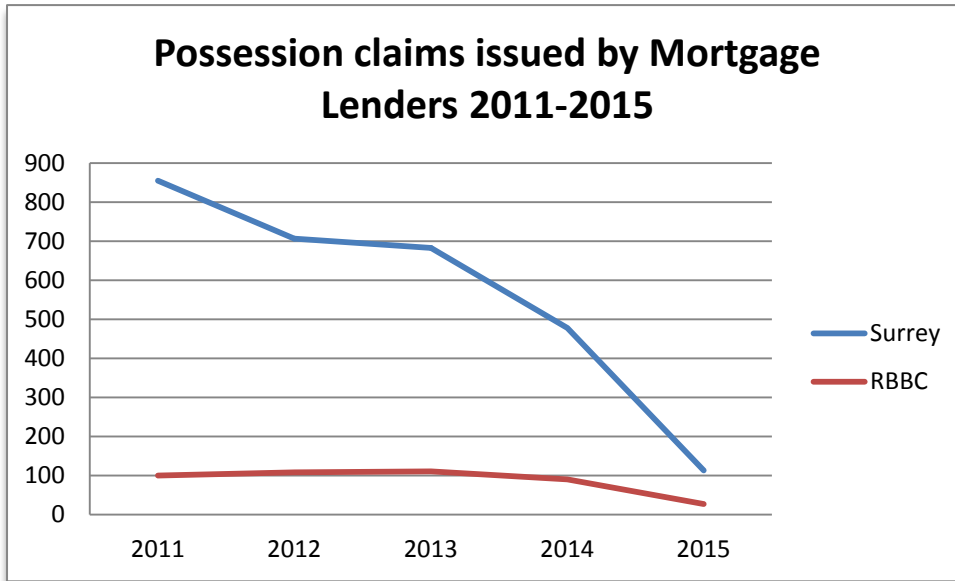
The table below shows that the most common cause of homelessness is the loss of rented/tied accommodation due to an AST termination. This cause has increased over the years and more than tripled from 2011-12 to 2015-15 totalling 30% of all causes. This is becoming a greater issue in the borough. A total of 22% of homelessness was caused by parental eviction, 14% by relatives/friends eviction and 9% due to a violent relationship breakdown with a partner.

Accepted applicants: causes of homelessness						
	2011-12	2012-13	2013-14	2014-15	2015-16	Total
Parental eviction	22	17	27	21	16	103
Relatives/friends eviction	8	16	15	13	13	65
Non-violent relationship breakdown - partner	2	2	9	4	5	22
Violent relationship breakdown – partner	3	8	8	15	9	43
Violent relationship breakdown - associated person	0	1	1	4	0	6
Other forms of violence	1	1	1	2	1	6
Racially motivated harassment	0	0	1	0	1	2
Other forms of harassment	0	0	0	1	2	3
Repossession of home - mortgage arrears	1	3	2	0	2	8
Rent arrears - RSL	0	0	0	3	1	4
Rent arrears - PRS	3	3	8	6	5	25
Loss of rented/tied accommodation due to AST termination	12	14	21	55	42	144
Other reasons than AST termination	1	0	1	2	0	4
Left prison / on remand	0	0	1	0	0	1
Left hospital	0	0	1	1	2	4
Left other institution or LA care	1	2	3	0	0	6
Other reason	4	1	5	12	5	27
TOTAL	58	68	104	139	104	473

Source: P1E

Mortgage repossession

There have been a total of 436 possession claims issued since 2011 – 2015 (Shelter databank February 2016) in the borough. Out of these claims, only 8 households sought assistance from the Council for mortgage repossessions during this time indicating that most households facing homelessness because of repossession do not approach the Council directly for assistance. The graph below shows that the number of possession claims made by mortgage lenders has declined drastically for both Surrey and RBBC. In 2011, a total 855 possession claims were made by mortgage lenders which gradually reduced to 113 in 2015. Similarly, a total of 100 possession claims were made in 2011 which reduced to 27 in 2015. Despite 436 possession claims issued between 2011 and 2015, only 105 repossessions actually took place within this time frame (Gov: Mortgage and Landlord Possession Statistics 2015). This also explains why there was no detrimental effect on the Council when the Government stopped its Mortgage Rescue Scheme.



Source: Shelter Databank (February 2016)

Homelessness and main priority categories

In common with the previous Homelessness Strategy, the vast majority of accepted homeless applicants fall under the dependent children category. They form 74% of all accepted households and mark a 27% increase from the last strategy. The next largest group is people with a physical disability, followed by pregnancy (but no other children).

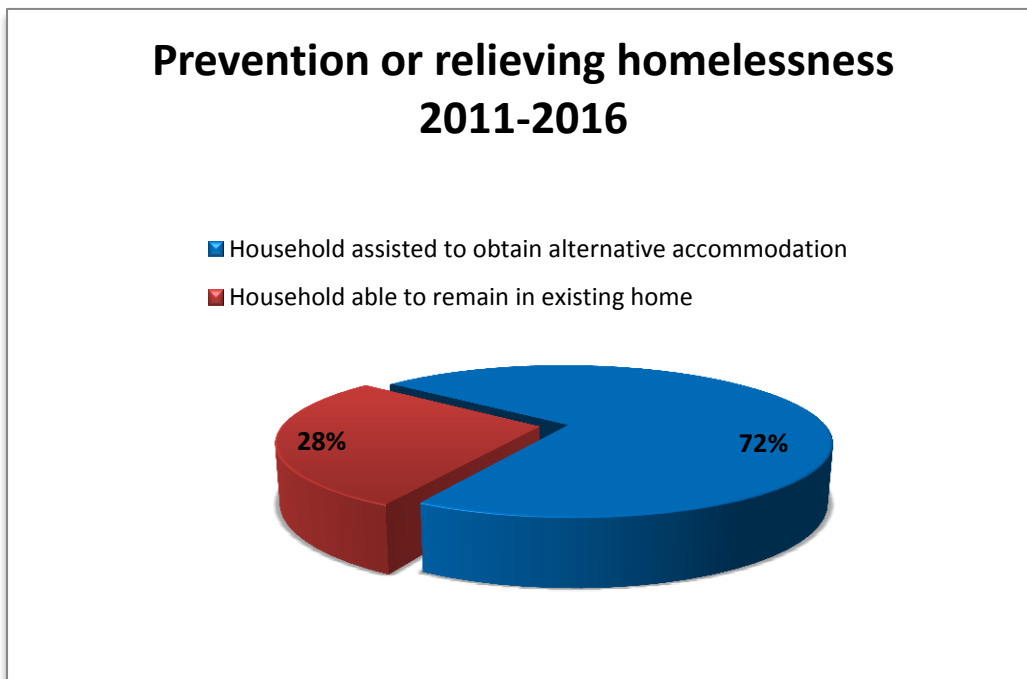
The number of 16/17 year old homeless applicants has reduced to 5% from 9% since the last Strategy which demonstrates the Council's strong and effective partnership with the Youth Support Service (YSS) who manage all homeless households aged 16 to 17.

Accepted applicants: main priority category						
	2011-12	2012-13	2013-14	2014-15	2015-16	Total
Dependent children	44	53	76	96	77	346
Pregnant & no other dependent children	7	6	7	11	5	36
Aged 16/17 years old	1	1	0	0	0	2
"Care leaver" aged 18 to 20 years old	0	0	3	0	0	3
Old age	0	2	0	2	6	10
Physical disability	3	4	12	13	10	42
Mental illness or disability	3	2	4	15	4	28
Drug dependency	0	0	0	1	0	1
Alcohol dependency	0	0	0	0	1	1
Been in "Care"	0	0	1	0	1	2
Violence/threat of violence/domestic violence	0	0	2	1	0	3

Source: P1E

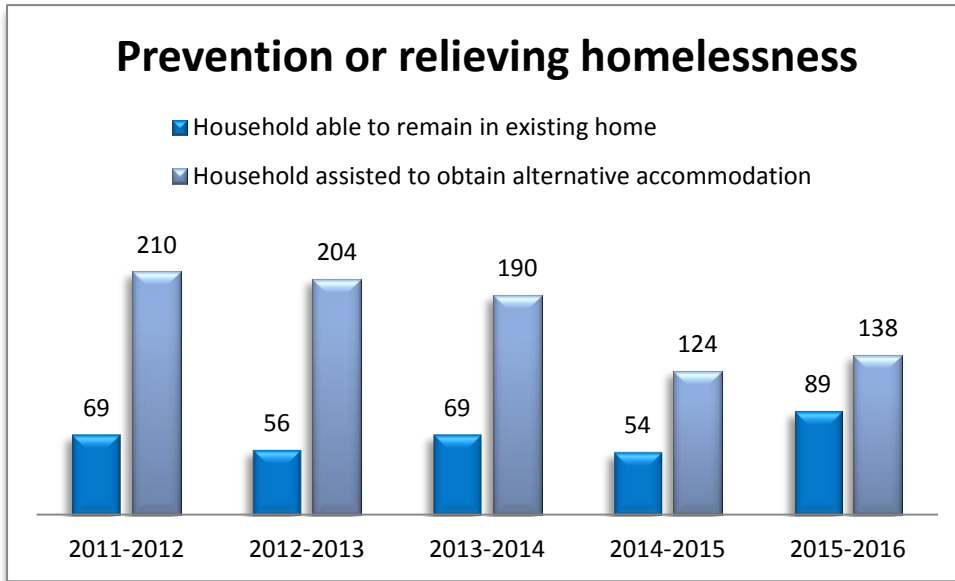
Homelessness prevention

Preventing homelessness is the focal point of all housing options undertaken by Housing Services. Including non-statutory homeless households, over 1200 households have been prevented or relieved from homelessness between 2011 and 2016. Through successful advice and assistance, households were helped to find and secure alternative accommodation or to remain in their existing home which avoided the need for a homeless application.



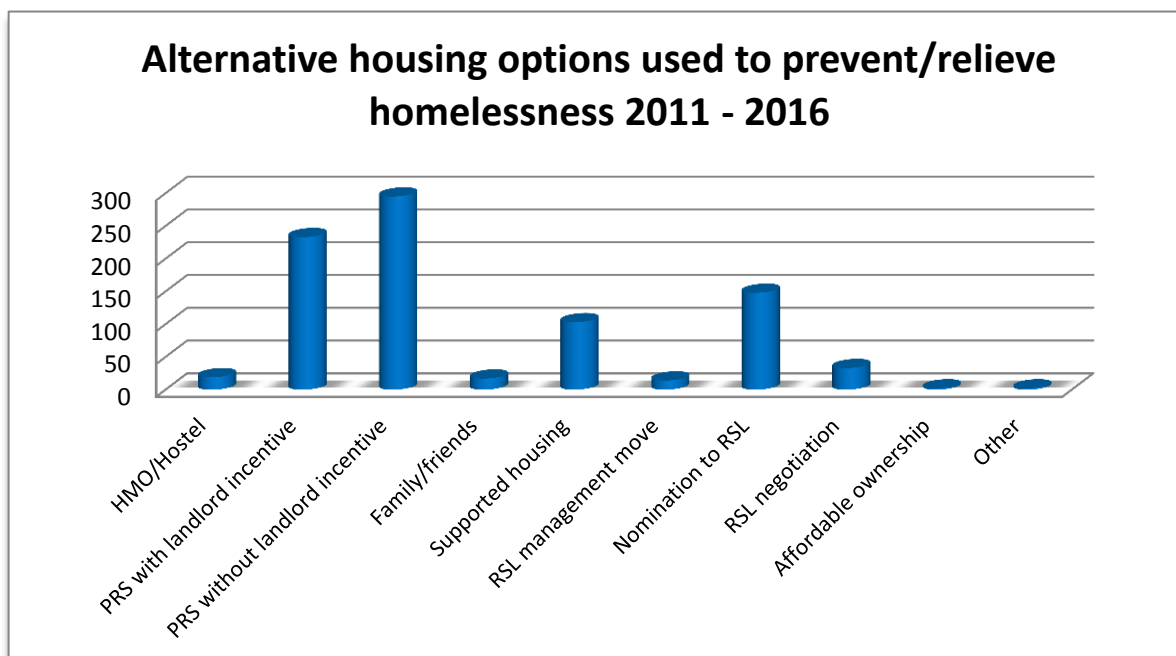
Source: P1E

The number of households assisted into obtaining alternative accommodation was highest in 2011/2012; however the figures began to decrease until 2015/16. On the other hand, the number of households assisted to remain in their existing home fluctuated from 2011/12 to 2014/2015, however in 2015/16 it saw its highest increase.



Source: P1E

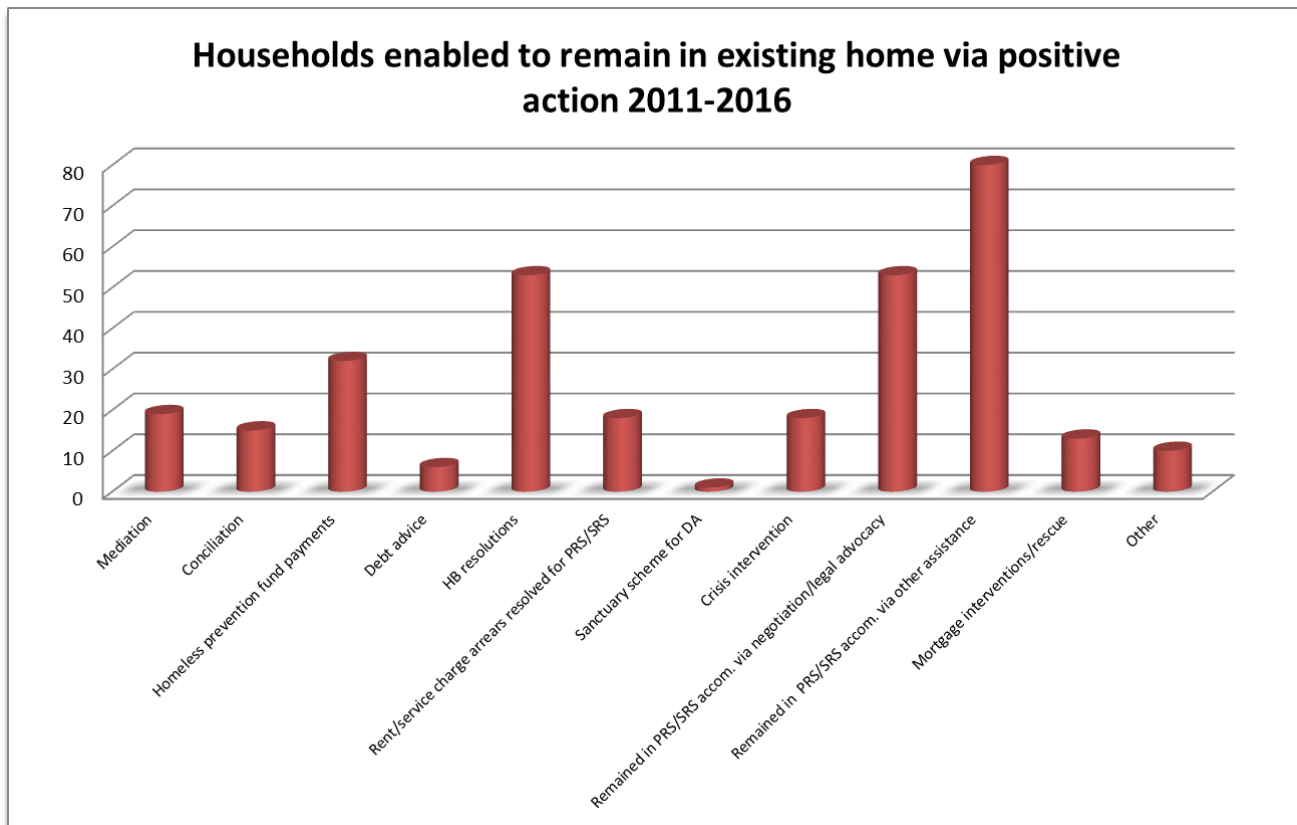
Continuing the work of the previous Homelessness Strategy, the graph below shows assistance into the private rented sector without a landlord incentive has been the most frequently used housing option. This is closely followed by help into the private rented sector through landlord incentive schemes and nominating households to the social rented sector via the Housing Register waiting list. This latter option is particularly used to place qualifying applicants into sheltered accommodation. This is because there is a good supply of this type of accommodation.



Source: P1E

The table above shows that the Council has helped applicants threatened with homelessness to remain in their existing accommodation through various means. Many households were able to remain in their private rented accommodation or social housing accommodation through other

assistance, such as applicants securing Suspended Possession Orders, landlords retracting their eviction notices/extending tenancies and also support from organisations such as the Police to confirm the security of remaining in their home. Resolving Housing Benefit issues and negotiating / providing legal advocacy have both been equally successful in enabling households to remain in their accommodation.



Source: P1E

Available tools to prevent homelessness

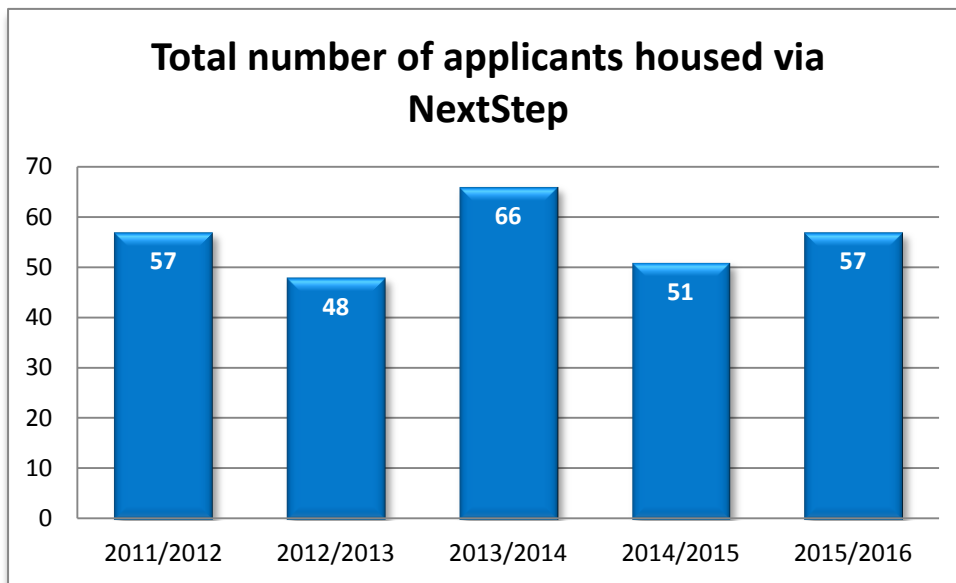
- **Support and advice**

The Council's Housing Options Officers and Tenancy Advisors aim to prevent homelessness wherever possible. They undertake detailed casework including financial assessments and benefits advice, make referrals to other organisations like Community Debt Advice, as well as advising clients on the legal validity of Notices, negotiating and mediating with landlords, letting agents as well as parents and other friends / relatives of applicants. They also negotiate with a range of organisations for example Adult Social Care, Children Services, Youth Support Service, Police, Probation, Family Support Team, client's solicitors, Registered Social Landlords, charitable organisations, the law courts and

bailiffs to avoid homelessness or to delay homelessness or to avoid or reduce time spent by households in B&B.

- **NextStep Rent Deposit Guarantor Scheme**

This scheme is run by NextStep YMCA East Surrey and is funded by the Council. NextStep works with private landlords to secure tenancies for clients referred to the scheme by the Council because they are at risk of homelessness. NextStep offers rent deposit guarantee bonds, free inventories and tenant introductions and provides landlords and tenants with support during the first 6 months of their tenancy. Clients are encouraged to find a potential property independently although NextStep sources many of the properties and landlords.



The graph above shows the number of households that have been housed over the last 5 years, with the highest number in 2013/2014. NextStep has only ever paid out one claim, costing £650 from the bond pot for the loss of rent during the last 5 financial years. This is because NextStep maintains strong long-term partnerships with landlords and works to resolve issues so that tenancies are maintained.

- **Housing Register**

The Housing Register Allocations Policy has been amended twice in the last 5 years in response to the Localism Act and also to manage the housing expectations of households in the borough. Nominations through the Register are the main source of accommodation for low income households but the Register is not able to offer a quick solution to households facing homelessness. The table below shows that the number of nominations received in the last financial year have decreased in comparison to the previous years. During the last financial year, 53 of the 295 nominations were to sheltered accommodation. Typically, nominations to sheltered housing equate to approximately 13% of all the nominations received each year.

Year	Total no of nominations
2011/2012	303
2012/2013	349
2013/2014	321
2014/2015	361
2015/2016	295

The Housing Register Policy is written to encourage households to privately rent as applicants who are a '*Homeseeker currently living in private rented accommodation and the current tenancy is less than 4 years*' (Section 7.1) will qualify for the Band C priority group. Previously, homeseekers in the private rented sector were excluded from the Housing Register. This is a long term solution which promotes the PRS whilst applicants wait on the Housing Register list.

Households owed the homelessness duty by the Council are placed in band H of the Register. This is a priority band on the Register.

- **Money and Debt Advice**

Budgeting and debt issues are a common problem experienced by households facing homelessness. The Council has published a Money Advice fact sheet on its website with basic advice and sign posting to local and national organisations able to assist. Information is also provided in the Housing Options Toolkit. The Council works closely with Community Debt Advice (CDA) a specialist money advice service staffed by volunteers. Clients are referred to CDA who offer practical help and advice to get debts under control, make affordable offers to creditors and complete income and expenditure financial statements. Other local agencies including Citizens Advice Bureau and Moneywise (for Raven tenants) also offer this service.

- **Discretionary Housing Payment (DHP) fund**

The DHP fund is administered by Housing Benefit in partnership with Housing Services. The fund is used to assist qualifying households who are at risk of homelessness and is a useful tool for the Housing Options team. The payments can be used to fund rent in advance, deposits, rent arrears and bridge shortfalls between rent and benefit payments. This fund has prevented homelessness for a number of clients.

Total DHP expenditure in the last 3 financial years

Year	DHP contribution	Total spend
2013/2014	£152,284	£159,813
2014/2015	£176,372	£178,154
2015/2016	£136,684	£147,298

DHP expenditure for Housing Options in the last 2 financial years

Year	Total spend
2014/2015	£63,519.64
2015/2016	£74,413.62

The Housing Options Team has assisted clients to access DHPs to secure alternative accommodation (e.g. rent deposit) and to help clients with short term rental costs while the claimant secures and moves to alternative accommodation. Over the last 5 financial years, the DHP contribution has increased which has enabled the Council to use it in a more practical and proactive way to prevent homelessness and it is now a critical prevention tool.

- **Repossession Prevention Fund**

The DCLG made a one-off payment in 2009 of £47,500 followed by a top of up £30,000 in 2012. This fund, similar to the DHP, is used to cover costs that may stop a household from becoming homeless.

Year	Total spend
2013/2014	£14,154.65
2014/2015	£27,616.98
2015/2016	£52,457.69

Up until 2013/14 the Fund was little used but is now a flexible tool that can be used in a number of ways to avoid homelessness. The table above shows that compared to 2013/14, total expenditure has more than tripled in the last financial year. The Fund was exhausted in 2016/17 and a further £20,000 was secured as a top up from the Council's Corporate Plan Delivery Fund. The table below shows how the Council has taken various measures to avoid clients becoming homelessness using the RPF during the last financial year.

How RPF has been used (2015/16)	Cost
Rent in advance / deposits / rent in advance with deposits as single payment	£489 to £2275
Clearing rent arrears	£400 to £2006.76
Work to property	£2990
Garden clearance	£450
Skip hire	£366

- **Housing Advice Self-Help Tool**

The Self-Help Tool (previously known as the Housing Wizard) is an online service that gives practical housing advice and other additional support that relates to individual needs. Clients simply fill in their details to create an account and answer a set of questions which then produces a tailored action plan of advice and guidance. The information will be saved on-line and can be accessed again at any time through the website. Over the last 2 financial years, 295 people have used the service, of which 121 completed the whole tool.

We acknowledge that the Self-Help Tool is currently not promoted or used to its full potential and aim to re-introduce it as a main homelessness prevention tool to avoid common life experiences turning into a housing crisis.

- **Parashoot**

The Council makes referrals to Parashoot for households with support needs. Funded by the County Housing Related Support budget and operating from Raven Housing Trust, it offers eligible clients up to 6 months support to help maintain their tenancy.

- **Winter Night Shelter**

The Shelter for rough sleepers opens for 3 months during winter and is operated by Renewed Hope Trust. It also allows the Council and East Surrey Outreach Service (eSOS) to use the time spent in the Shelter to help find alternative accommodation before the Shelter closes. The Council has made a donation towards the running of the Shelter each year and intends to continue to do so.

Year	Total number of beds used	Number of guests	Number of volunteers
2011/2012	277	23	N/A
2012/2013	527	25	404
2013/2014	583	21	540
2014/2015	200	6	231
2015/2016	381	18	289

The table above shows that although 2012/13 had the most guests, the highest number of beds used was in 2013/14. There was also a significant drop in the number of guests in 2014/15 which then increased again in the following year.

- **Rent in advance / deposit**

The Council offers a minimum offer of £500 towards rent in advance or a deposit paid directly to a private landlord for all non-priority need homeless households with a local connection to the borough of Reigate and Banstead. In the last 2 financial years, a total of 189 households have been assisted through this scheme; 63 in 2014/15 and a further 126 in 2015/16.

- **Supported accommodation**

The Council is able to access supported accommodation for clients which require it. This includes YMCA East Surrey Hillbrook House for young people aged up to 30, Wayside hostel for young women, women's refuges, low support accommodation for ex-offenders, out of borough direct access hostels, accommodation provided by Transform Housing & Support for people with mental health issues and/or learning difficulties, dry houses for those that have successfully completed drug or alcohol programmes and supported accommodation provided by Active Prospects for people with mental health needs and / or learning disabilities.

- **Family Support Team**

Occasionally, referrals are made to the FST who support families who are experiencing a range of difficult interwoven issues. Families who have two or more of the following issues are eligible for the programme:

- Children who need help
- Children who have not been attending school regularly
- Parents and children involved in crime or anti-social behaviour
- Parents and children with a range of health problems
- Families affected by domestic violence and abuse
- Adults out of work or at risk of financial exclusion and young people at risk of worklessness

The FST offer intensive support for up to 18 weeks with their main task being to stabilise the family function. The FST often seek advice from the Housing Team related to any Housing issues to ensure the right measures are put in place for families to avoid a housing crisis. The issues range from the risk of homelessness to matters regarding the Housing Register.

- **Sanctuary Scheme, ESDAS**

Housing part fund the Sanctuary Scheme run by East Surrey Domestic Abuse Service which works with the Police, clients and landlords to make properties safer for domestic abuse sufferers. Accommodation is made safer by increasing security to doors, windows, fencing, outdoor lighting and installing a 'safe room' in the property. In the borough of Reigate and Banstead, 20 households were assisted in 2014/2015 and a further 6 households assisted in 2015/16.

- **Rough sleepers**

East Surrey Outreach Service (eSOS), set up via the East Surrey Housing departments, proactively engages with rough sleepers and those threatened with rough sleeping (e.g. sofa surfers). They have a links to hostels and supported accommodation throughout Surrey as well as a good relationship with the Police and Probation. They also reconnect clients with areas they originate from if no connection is found with the Reigate and Banstead Area. The annual Rough Sleepers snapshot Survey carried out on November 2015 showed that there were 3 rough sleepers in the borough, 7 less than 2014.

- **Mortgage Interest Benefit**

Managed by the DWP, it can provide support to those who have a mortgage but have lost their employment. It only covers the interest on a mortgage for a fixed period of time. Under the scheme households wait six months before support is provided. From April 2016/17 households will wait nine months before support is provided and the support will be replaced by a loan which must be re-paid.

- **Financial Rent Guarantee**

This is offered to landlords in cases where this is the only obstacle for a homeless household moving into private rented accommodation rather than B&B or temporary accommodation. Currently, this is a pilot scheme being used for only financially stable households. Nevertheless the Council intends to develop this scheme with further funding and allocation of officer time. RBBC is the only local authority in Surrey which is operating a Rent Guarantee scheme. Since 2014/2015 to 2015/16, 8 households have been assisted through this scheme.

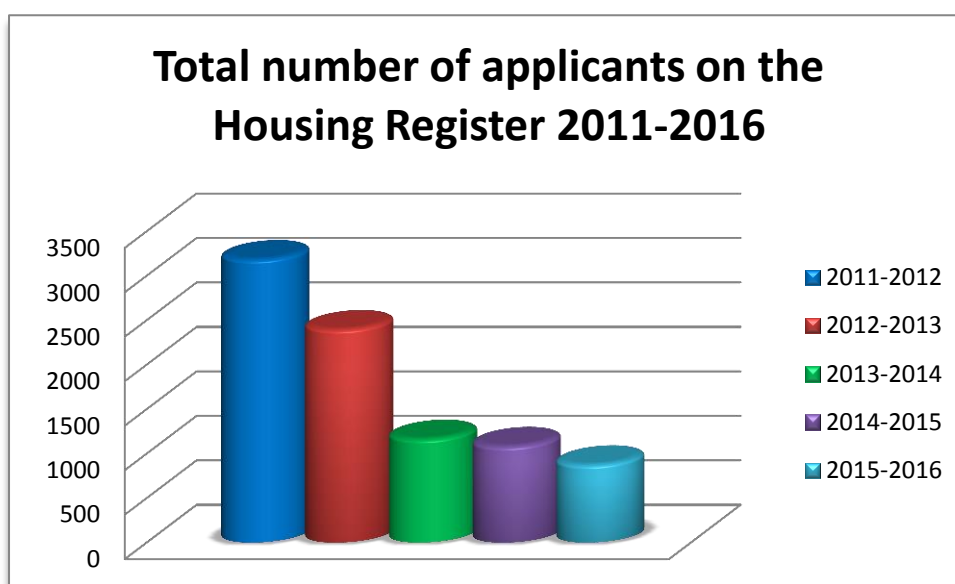
Housing Register

The Housing Register and Allocations Policy was updated in May 2015 which redefined the banding system and introduced a revised local connection rule and community contribution rules.

All housing register applicants are placed in Band A-D and Band H. The bands are broken down in levels of priority:

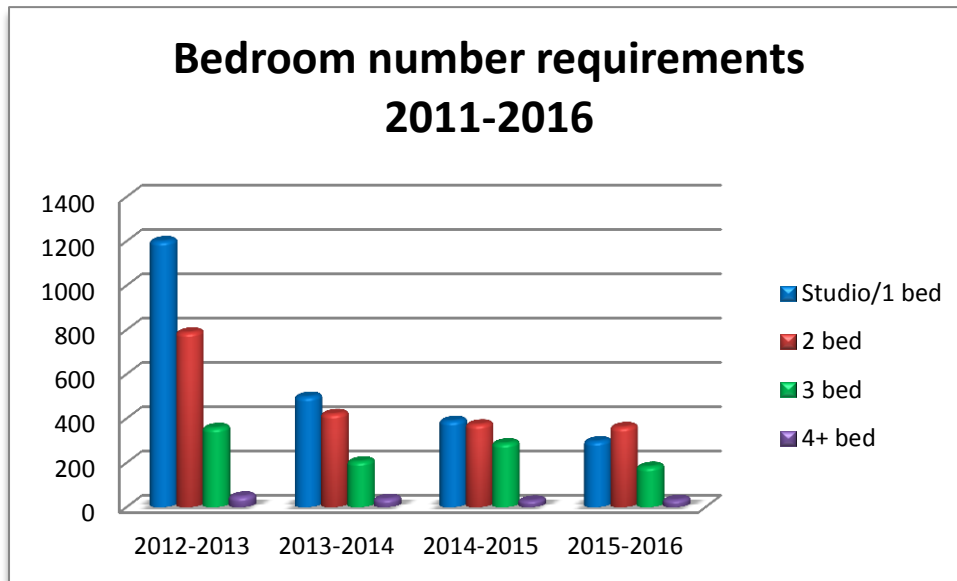
- Band A: Urgent priority
- Band B: High priority
- Band C: Medium priority and Community Contribution qualification
- Band D: Low priority Band C without Community Contribution/others
- Band H: High priority homeless households to whom the Council has accepted a duty to accommodate.

Applicants in Band B,C and D make online bids via HomeChoice, a choice-based lettings scheme. Applicants in band A and H receive suitable direct nominations from the Council.

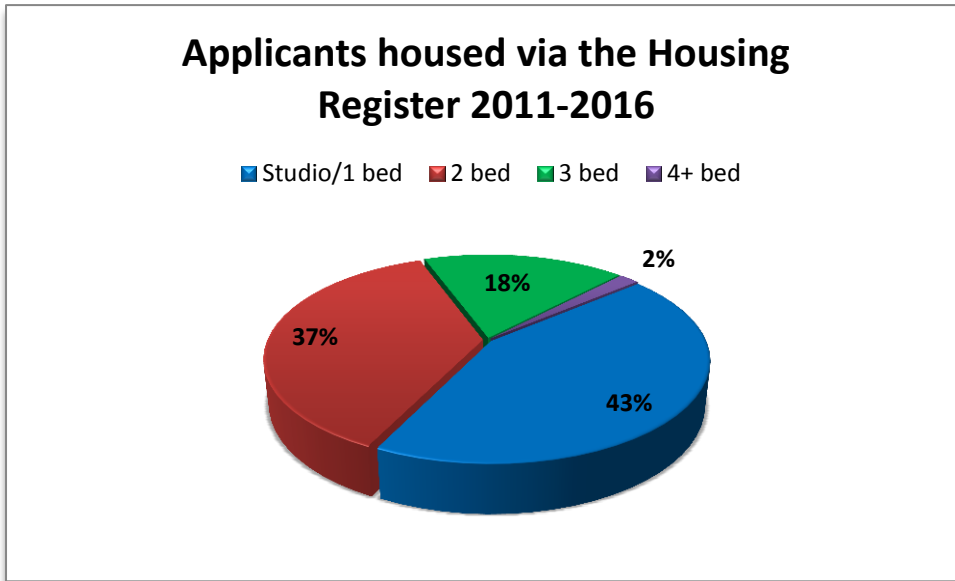


The number of applicants in the last financial year on the Housing Register has reduced by almost 30% since 2011-2012. A significant drop in numbers can be seen in the graph above after 2012-2013 which is largely due to an update in the Housing Register and Allocations Policy which restricted the qualification rules for the Register, resulting in the removal of many ineligible applicants. A further review of the Policy in 2015 also resulted in a slight reduction in households eligible to join the Housing Register.

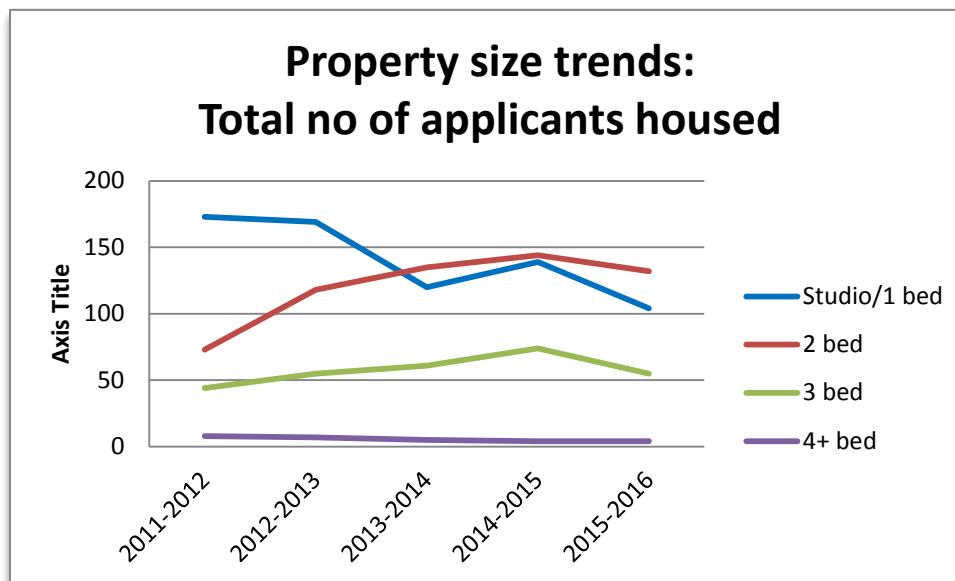
Since the last financial year, the number of households applying for the Housing Register each month is increasing.



From 2012, the Council began to record the number of bedrooms required by all households on the Housing Register. Until 2015, the highest demand amongst applicants was for studio/1bed properties however in 2015 this was overtaken by the need of 2 beds. Furthermore, a 3 bed property requirement has also reduced and the need of a 4 bed remains the lowest.



The graph above indicates that the percentage of different bedroom number properties allocated to Housing Register applicants reflects the demand for bedroom requirements as seen in the previous graph with almost half of all applicants allocated to studio/1 bed properties closely followed by 2 bed properties. Since the introduction of Band H, 65 homeless households have been housed via the Register in the last financial year.



There are noticeable trends in the availability of different sized properties over the last 5 years. The number of applicants housed in studio/1 beds has seen a marked decline over the period. On the other hand, the number of applicants housed in 2 beds increased since 2011-12 and saw only a slight reduction by 2015-16. Similarly, applicants housed in 3 beds also increased over the last 5 years reaching its peak in 2014-15, although numbers have begun to decrease more recently. The requirement of a 4+ bed property remained low throughout this time.

Year	Total no of applicants housed
2011 - 2012	298
2012 - 2013	349
2013 - 2014	321
2014 - 2015	361
2015 - 2016	295
Total	1624

After an increase from 2011-12, the total number of applicants housed varied slightly, however the total dropped significantly in 2015-16 which reflects the reduction of applicants on the Register following the changes made to the banding definitions in the Allocations Policy in 2015. Not all properties are general needs family accommodation and typically, nominations to sheltered housing equate to approximately 13% of all the nominations received each year.

RBBC Temporary accommodation

The Council has purchased 8 units to use as emergency accommodation using S106 monies for affordable housing. These properties are used for homeless households. Often they are used for homeless applicants with a poor tenancy record that prevents them from accessing tenancies through the private sector or housing associations. This gives households the opportunity to build a good tenancy history in Council owned accommodation so that they are in a better position to secure tenancies in the future.

TA purchased by RBBC

Area	Type	Size
Reigate	Flat	2 bed
Redhill	Maisonette	2 bed
Redhill	Flat	1 bed
Redhill	Flat	2 bed
Merstham	Flat	3 bed
Merstham	Flat	1 bed
Horley	House	3/4 bed
Horley	Flat	3 bed

Emergency accommodation

The Council has become heavily reliant on emergency self-contained bed and breakfast accommodation due to the shortage of emergency accommodation in the borough. All B&B placements are in London, predominantly South London. It costs the Council up to £100 per night to place homeless households in B&B and the full costs are not recovered from the tenant. The Council does not reserve or block book B&B accommodation so households are placed in the area

where a suitable vacancy is available on that day. The rising number of households in B&B caused an over spend of the 2015/16 Housing Budget. The continued use of emergency out-of-borough accommodation is unsustainable. The Council accommodates an average of 25 households per night in this accommodation at a cost of around £3,000 per week. In response, the Council is exploring options to develop its own emergency accommodation in the borough.

Executive
23 February 2017

Agenda Item: 4 Annex 2
Homelessness Review and
Strategy 2017-21



Homelessness Strategy

2017-2021

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Foreword

Executive Member People and Welfare

I am pleased to be introducing the Reigate & Banstead Borough Council Homelessness Strategy for 2017-21. Despite the financial challenges facing the borough we remain committed to doing all we can to prevent homelessness through early intervention and the provision of timely support and advice.

In the previous five years we have achieved a great deal. We have ended the use of temporary accommodation for 16-17 year olds, ended the placement of families for more than six weeks into shared facility bed and breakfast accommodation, worked in partnership to set up the East Surrey Outreach Service to prevent people from sleeping rough under the Government's 'No Second Night Out' agenda, we have purchased 8 units of self contained emergency accommodation and piloted a rent guarantor scheme to assist households to access private rented accommodation.

There are many direct and underlying causes of homelessness. In response we have developed a flexible approach to preventing it supported by the use of a number of 'tools'. We cannot tackle homelessness alone. We rely on and appreciate having close working relationships with teams across the Council, housing associations, supported housing providers, tenancy support providers, the voluntary sector and other public agencies.

The 2017-21 Homelessness Strategy is published at a time of significant challenge and change. The Homelessness Reduction Bill is progressing rapidly through Parliament and is set to fundamentally change the way homelessness services are provided. Over the last year we have reviewed the way our service operates. This has led to increased resources and has strengthened our ability to respond more effectively to the challenges of homelessness.

Housing costs for sale and private rent continue to rise. Households that in the past would have accessed homeownership now have to rely on the private rented sector. Welfare reform has reduced the amount that low income households can pay for housing and this is making private renting and affordable rents difficult to afford. This is a demanding environment, but we have set ourselves the challenge of making more use of the private rented housing market, reducing use of bed and breakfast accommodation and continuing to prevent homelessness and tackle rough sleeping.

The Council is committed to delivering new housing and regenerating Redhill town centre, Preston and Merstham. Redhill town centre regeneration will deliver additional town centre homes as well as improved convenience shopping and leisure facilities and employment opportunities. Preston regeneration continues to deliver new homes with 26 affordable and 130 market homes together with outline planning permission granted for 180 homes on the DeBurgh School site. The development of 1,510 new homes at Westvale Park, Horley is well underway. The site includes over 370 affordable homes, a leisure centre and school. Westvale will deliver a steady supply of new homes over the next 10 years. The regeneration of Merstham has now reached a milestone with the completion of 30 affordable

rented and shared ownership homes in Purbeck Close, the completion of a new convenience store, three shops and 10 shared ownership flats. The completion of a community hub is due in Spring 2017.

Over the coming five years of this strategy, the Council will continue to put energy and resources into preventing homelessness. We are committed to helping local people and will work closely with partners to improve the lives of those using our service.

Councillor Rita Renton

1. Introduction

The Homelessness Act (2002) places a duty of each local authority to carry out a review of homelessness and to develop a new Homelessness Strategy every five years.

The Homelessness Review provides a detailed assessment of:

- The levels and likely future levels of homelessness in the borough
- Activities that are carried out which prevent homelessness, secure accommodation for homeless people and provide support to people who are or may become homeless
- Resources available to carry out these activities.

The Homelessness Strategy must set out how the Council will prevent homelessness and provide support to people who are homeless, or at risk of becoming homeless during the next five years.

Reigate & Banstead Borough Council produced its first Homelessness Strategy in 2003. The last Homelessness Strategy was published in 2011 and the key priorities of it were:

- Develop the Housing Options Approach
- Strengthen partnership working
- Engage the private rented sector
- Increase the supply of and maximise the use of existing affordable housing
- Deliver efficient customer focused services

The Council has made progress to develop services and initiatives which are aimed at preventing homelessness and providing realistic solutions to those in housing need.

Homelessness in the borough has risen over the last five years peaking in 2014/15. Whilst homeless acceptances reduced in 2015/16 the number of housing options approaches has continued to rise. In the coming years we expect a further increase in the number of households approaching the housing service for housing advice and assistance as further welfare reforms are implemented and demand for housing rises.

The Homelessness Strategy is divided into two parts:

Part 1 The Housing Review contains the data on homelessness in the borough. This document is published separately.

Part 2 The Homelessness Strategy sets out the context of the Council's housing service, gives a picture of existing services and initiatives to prevent homelessness and sets out the objectives and priority actions for the Reigate & Banstead Borough Council's Homelessness Strategy 2017-21.

2. Executive summary

Our Homelessness Strategy is set in the context of unprecedented changes to welfare benefits impacting on individual households as well as the organisations providing essential support services to them, rising housing costs and continuing homelessness. In spite of these challenges this is a positive Strategy with a strong focus on homelessness prevention. Our aim is to strengthen the resilience of households at risk of homelessness through early intervention, support to overcome practical issues that make them vulnerable to homelessness and assistance to make positive decisions about their housing options.

Our 2011-16 Homelessness Strategy was ambitious. We delivered on many of our priorities. These included strengthening joint working with the housing benefit team and collaborative working on use of the Discretionary Housing Payment Fund (DHP) to prevent homelessness, the creation of an Accommodation Sustainment Officer post working on tenancy sustainment, a minimum offer of £500 deposit to non priority households, the creation of the East Surrey Outreach Service (eSOS) to assist street the homeless and the set up the first Rent Guarantor Scheme. A lack of resources, or changes to the priorities of the Housing Options Service resulted in some actions not being delivered.

The main challenge during the 2011-16 Strategy was the significant increase in numbers of households applying as homeless. The Homelessness Review, which is published separately, shows that this peaked in 2014/15 with 189 homelessness decisions and 139 homeless acceptances. The main cause of homelessness was the loss of private rented accommodation. This was followed by parental evictions of children, and then by friends / relative evictions.

The majority of homeless accepted households continue to be those with children. Lone parent households represent just over half of all households accepted as homeless and are predominately female headed. In contrast, male applicants dominate one person homeless households. Looking at the prevention work undertaken during the last five years over 1,200 households were assisted to avoid homelessness. Of these 72% were assisted to obtain alternative accommodation and 28% were able to remain in their existing home. Assistance into the private rented sector (PRS) without a landlord incentive was the most frequently used prevention tool followed by entry into PRS with a landlord incentive. The third preventative measure was the offer of a sheltered housing unit to qualifying homeless households. Although the fourth frequently used tool was supported housing it provides a housing lifeline to vulnerable individuals who need more intensive support to sustain their tenancies or who are more challenging and difficult to place with mainstream providers.

A range of tools have been used to prevent homelessness to date and will continue to be used subject to the availability of resources. No single prevention tool can provide the solution to homelessness; it is the combination of tools that are applied to an individual's circumstances that delivers results. However, we do know some tools have been particularly effective. These include the use of the DHPs to assist with rent deposits, rent in advance and short-term rent to benefit gaps, the NextStep Rent Deposit Bond Scheme which consistently assists 50 households a year into private rented housing and finally the use of the Repossession Prevention Fund for standard rent deposits / advances and more unusual interventions such as rubbish clearance. These three tools in particular are essential to the delivery of the 2017-21 Strategy.

The 2017-21 Strategy contains four main objectives:

- **Objective 1: Prevent homelessness and sustain tenancies** - Four priority areas are linked to delivering this objective. Our overall focus is to provide a housing options prevention service with access to advice, information and assistance at the earliest opportunity. Secondly, we need to ensure clients are able to access support services to enable them to get housed or sustain their tenancies. Effective partnerships with support providers are essential to safeguard services. Thirdly, we need to ensure the increasing numbers of domestic abuse victims approaching for help are assisted effectively and sensitively. Finally, we need to provide support to single homeless people who are experiencing increasing difficulty accessing accommodation and are facing street homelessness.
- **Objective 2: Increase the supply of private rented accommodation available to people at risk of homelessness** - the availability of and access to private rented housing is crucial to managing demand and preventing homelessness. It can offer a flexible housing option to those who cannot afford to buy, need a quick housing solution or face a long wait for social housing. Our priority is to expand the current rent deposit bond scheme so more households can be assisted to avoid homelessness which in turn reduces pressure on B&B usage. Our Rent Guarantor Scheme will continue to offer support to selected households to enable them to secure private accommodation.
- **Objective 3: Work in partnership to minimise the impact of welfare reform on our residents and increase access to employment for people in housing need and at risk of homelessness** – access to employment is critical for households facing the impacts of welfare reform. Our priority is to deliver a multi-agency response to residents affected by it to prevent homelessness. This aims to get more households working, to support them manage their housing costs and to budget. Overcoming the barriers to work is essential and the East Surrey Pathway Project will target those individuals furthest from work. Preparing households for Universal Credit will help prevent homelessness. A lack of financial awareness underpins many housing problems. Taking a joined up approach to improving financial awareness and the provision of money advice is essential to enable more resources to be identified for this activity.
- **Objective 4: Reduce the use of bed and breakfast accommodation** - our priorities are two-fold. Firstly we will assist more households owed a homelessness duty into suitable private rented accommodation to reduce the number waiting in temporary accommodation. The enhanced rent deposit scheme will assist us to deliver this approach. Secondly, we need to minimise the use of out of borough B&Bs. We intend to use developer contributions to deliver some 25 units of temporary accommodation in the borough. This will reduce expenditure on B&B accommodation and enable more effective support to be given to homeless households.

Homelessness prevention is the central aim of the homelessness strategy. This is a constant challenge in the face of welfare reform, uncertainty around the future funding of support services and a competitive housing market in which increasing number of households are relying on private rented accommodation. Nevertheless, through our Strategy we remain committed to working with our partners to tackle the causes of homelessness, to gain more access to the private rented sector and reduce our reliance on out of borough bed and breakfast accommodation.

3. The Policy & Legislative Background

The Homelessness Strategy is set within the context of national policy, legislation and local policies. Since publication of the last homelessness strategy a number of significant policy and legislative changes have been introduced which have influenced the way the Council responds now and in the future to homelessness.

3.1 'Making Every Contact Count: A Joint Approach to Preventing Homelessness'

This is the Government's cross-department report on tackling homelessness through early prevention and integrated services. Published in 2012, it sets out the Government's approach to tackling the causes of homelessness focusing on prevention, early intervention and a local response. The report includes ten local challenges for local authorities to meet to achieve the highest homelessness standards. The challenges have been adopted and developed into a framework by the National Practitioner Support Service (NPSS). The NPSS has developed the Gold Standard framework which is a 10 step continuous improvement approach for front line services which local authorities can follow and ultimately apply for the Gold Standard Homelessness Service status.

3.2 No Second Night Out

A national vision launched in 2011 to tackle rough sleeping through early intervention to help people get off the street and into a place of safety. It sets out five standards which aim to get rough sleepers off the street immediately, give them access to emergency accommodation, services and / or reconnection to their community.

3.3 Welfare Reform

A number of changes have already been introduced and more are due to be implemented in the next few years which have affected access to housing and the ability of households to retain their tenancies. The most significant welfare reforms impacting on the affordability of housing and homelessness include:

- Local Housing Allowance (LHA) reductions including total LHA caps and the limiting of LHA to the 30th percentile of market rents
- The Total Benefit Cap limiting the maximum benefits that households can receive. In 2013 Phase 1 limited couples and families to £500 per week and single people to £350 per week. Phase 2 reduced the weekly Cap to £384.62 for couples and families and £257.69 for single people outside of London in 2016.
- Spare Room Subsidy (called the 'Bedroom Tax') reduced the housing benefit entitlement of working age social housing tenants considered to be under occupying their homes by 14% for one spare bedroom and 25% for two or more spare bedrooms
- The Single Accommodation Rate limit which is applied to people aged under 35 in private rented accommodation is being rolled out to social housing tenants from 2018. It will cap housing benefit to between £79.55 and £82.46 per week in the borough¹.
- Disability Benefit changes and the replacement of Council Tax Benefit with local Council Tax support has reduced benefit income to a wide range of working age adults
- Introduction of Universal Credit to provide a single stream-lined benefit paid directly to households (to include housing benefit) rather than their landlords

¹ Based on 2016-17 borough LHA rates

The Council has responded to the first tranche of changes brought about by welfare reform and continues to work with households affected by Phase 2. Phase 1 Households have been given advice, information and assistance to overcome the cap, including employment advice, housing advice and support to find alternative accommodation and assessed to ensure they were in receipt of their full benefit entitlements. The Council has also worked closely with social landlords to identify and assist households affected by the 'Bedroom Tax' to move to smaller accommodation.

3.4 The Localism Act 2011

The Act introduced significant changes to the Housing Act 1996. The objective of it is to enable local authorities to better manage housing demand and access to housing within the context of local circumstances.

The main changes introduced by the Localism Act include:

- Local authority power to end their homelessness duty with an offer of accommodation in the private rented sector
- Social housing tenure reform to allow social landlords to grant fixed term tenancies with limited security of tenure
- The requirement for local authorities to adopt a Tenancy Strategy by 2013 setting out the matters to which social landlords must have regard in setting their tenancy policies
- Social housing allocation reform which allows local authorities to set locally relevant allocation policies

The Government introduced the Homelessness (Suitability of Accommodation) (England) Order 2012 as guidance to local authorities on the standards of accommodation that may be used by local authorities as temporary accommodation and to end the homelessness duty.

3.6 Our 5 Year Plan 2015-20 – A great place to live and work

The Council's 5 Year Plan sets out a vision for Reigate & Banstead. It explains how we will prioritise resources and deliver services to the people living and working in the borough. The plan was developed using evidence from our borough profile, stakeholder feedback and market research. The [borough profile](#) provides a wealth of information about the demographics of the borough.

The Council's [five year plan](#) has 13 priorities based around three themes:

- People: supporting residents to enjoy healthy and happy lifestyles
- Place: A great place to live and work
- Organisation: a great Council

3.7 Reigate and Banstead Local Plan: Core Strategy 2014

Adopted in July 2014, the Core Strategy guides future development in the borough and indicates broad locations for future housing, employment, retail infrastructure and other land uses as well as setting out some more detailed policies used to assess planning applications. It includes an affordable housing policy which sets a target of 100 new affordable homes a year.

3.8 Affordable Housing Supplementary Planning Document

Adopted in 2014 the SPD contains the detailed guidance on how the Council will interpret and apply the Core Strategy policy on Affordable Housing. In summary, it details the requirements for larger and smaller sites, contains guidance about delivering affordable homes and explains how to calculate financial contributions on small sites.

3.9 East Surrey Housing Strategy

The last East Surrey Housing Strategy ended in 2013, and we have moved to a joint position statement. The statement covers Mole Valley, Reigate & Banstead and Tandridge Councils and confirms that our housing priorities have remained largely unchanged and are:

- Maximising supply
- Shaping supply
- Making best use of existing resources
- Preventing homelessness
- Supporting vulnerable people

3.10 The Reigate & Banstead Tenancy Strategy

Sets out the type of social rented housing tenancies that the Council expects Registered Providers to provide in the borough. The Strategy seeks to:

- Ensure that affordable housing meets locally identified housing need
- Provide guidance and direction to housing providers regarding their use of Affordable Rent properties and flexible tenancies
- Indicate to existing and prospective tenants what they can expect from a tenancy for an affordable rented property

3.11 Countywide Strategies

- Surrey Mental Health and Housing Protocol 2016
- Surrey Domestic Abuse Strategy 2013-18
- Surrey Prolific Priority Offenders Protocol 2007
- Surrey County Council 'Confident in Surrey's Future' Corporate Strategy 2016-17

4. Review of Achievements - Homelessness Strategy 2011-16

Since publication of the 2011 Homelessness Strategy we have made considerable progress in strengthening our housing options approach, building stronger partnerships to tackle homelessness and understanding the housing market. Our achievements are set within the context of a succession of national and legislative changes within the public sector which will continue to impact on the housing sector during the lifetime of the new Homelessness Strategy.

The challenge throughout the last five years has been to prevent homelessness in an area characterised by high housing costs. We have adopted a flexible approach and have made use of a range of tools and initiatives tailored to each household's circumstances. Our partners have supported us to deliver new initiatives such as the rent guarantor scheme, the on-line housing options toolkit and outreach support service for single rough sleepers. We have employed a dedicated Accommodation Sustainment Officer to prevent homelessness through earlier more intensive involvement with the household and this has achieved positive results.

Our achievements against the themes of the previous strategy are summarised below.

Theme 1: Develop the Housing Options Approach

We have:

- Intervened to prevent over 1,200 households from becoming homeless between 2011 and 2016
- Ended the use of temporary accommodation for 16-17 year olds and ended the use of shared facility B&B accommodation for families except in exceptional circumstances and limited any such placements to below 6 weeks
- Employed a Tenancy Advisor to work intensively with households at risk of homelessness to prevent it or assist with a planned move
- Piloted the Rent Guarantor Scheme in which the Council acts as the guarantor for financially stable households facing homelessness who have found private rented accommodation but require a guarantor
- Worked in partnership with Surrey authorities and Abris (software supplier) to develop an on-line housing options toolkit providing advice and information at anytime of day
- Implemented a minimum offer of £500 towards a deposit or rent in advance for single homeless people
- Contributed funding and on-going support to the Winter Night Shelter established in 2011/12 by Renewed Hope Trust to assist rough sleepers. In recent years we have worked in partnership with Tandridge DC to assist fund the Shelter
- Continued to provide funding to the Sanctuary Scheme run by East Surrey Domestic Abuse Service which works with the police, clients and landlords to make victim's properties safer through enhanced security and creation of 'safe rooms'
- Set up the East Surrey Outreach Service (eSOS) to help single rough sleepers access hostels, re-link back with family or friends and access healthcare and welfare services. eSOS has assisted 40 Council clients into housing / referred to drug, alcohol, mental, physical health services / given money advice in their first year
- Reviewed the Housing Register in response to the Localism Act (2011) in 2013 and again in 2015 to respond to local needs more effectively

Theme 2: Strengthen Partnership Working

We have:

- Co-located with the Neighbourhood Police Team, Adult Social Care, South East Surrey Family Support Team and Housing Benefit Teams which has enabled closer working, fostered improved working relationships and intelligence sharing
- Developed a close working relationship with the Family Support Team which has enabled a number of chaotic, financially unstable households to avoid homelessness through the provision of intensive support
- Continued to work with supported housing providers such as Transform Housing & Support, Cherchefelle², Vision Housing, YMCA East Surrey, Wayside and support service providers such as Parashoot to offer a range of housing options and support for more vulnerable individuals
- Established a joint assessment system with Housing Benefit for assessing Discretionary Housing Payments (DHPs) which has made a positive impact on preventing homelessness
- Worked in partnership with Mole Valley DC, Tandridge DC, Epsom & Ewell BC and Stonham Housing Association to implement a No Second Night Out project using DCLG and Councils' funding
- Worked in partnership with Women's Aid to secure DCLG funding to deliver additional accommodation for victims of domestic abuse
- Worked with Surrey County Council to agree a housing pathway for 16-17 year olds and care leavers. Took part in a rapid improvement event held in 2012 to address the challenges raised by the G v Southwark 2009 UKHL judgement which led to the creation of the Youth Support Service for Surrey and updates to the 16 – 17 year old Young Persons Protocol. A proactive approach to youth homelessness led to more focused and effective service for young people and created a platform for continued joint working. The Housing Team continues to meet the Care Leavers Service & Youth Support Service team on a monthly basis to agree housing pathways for care leavers.
- Developed close working relationships with the voluntary sector including Community Debt Advice, Citizen's Advice Bureau and Renewed Hope Trust so that we can offer clients referrals to specialised services on matters like money advice and debt management
- Regularly attended Multi-Agency Assessment Conferences (MARAC) which address serious domestic abuse cases to offer housing advice and referred cases to MARAC

Theme 3: Engage the Private Rented Sector

We have:

- Prevented homelessness for over 500 private rented households since 2011 through the active engagement of landlords and tenants to resolve rent arrears, benefits issues, communication issues and budgeting problems.
- Continued to work closely with YMCA East Surrey NextStep Rent Deposit Scheme to secure an average of at least 50 new private tenancies each year
- Reviewed the Housing Register & Allocation Policy to encourage more households to privately rent whilst they wait for the offer of affordable housing

² Cherchefelle merged with Transform Housing & Support in October 2016

- Used DHPs to fund rent in advance, deposits, pay rent arrears and bridge housing benefit shortfalls. The full DHP is used each year and is invaluable in preventing households becoming homeless
- Used the Repossession Prevention Fund creatively to prevent homelessness. The Fund has been used for rent in advance, deposits, repairs, garden clearance and to assist households in mortgage arrears. Much of the money is repaid by clients enabling it to be recycled to assist others.

Theme 4: Increase the Supply and Maximise the Use of Existing Affordable Housing

We have:

- Delivered 446 new affordable homes between 2011/16 of which 263 were rented and 183 shared ownership
- Provided funding to create an additional new room in a Hyde Housing Association mother and baby unit in the borough managed by Transform Housing & Support
- Provided funding to YMCA East Surrey to support the delivery of low support move-on accommodation for young people leaving Hillbrook House
- Provided funding to Raven Housing Trust for loft conversions to accommodate larger families and address a gap in the supply of larger affordable homes
- Provided funding to Raven Housing Trust to facilitate the build of four houses in Horley for affordable rent
- Acquired 8 units of temporary accommodation in the borough for homeless households using affordable housing planning contributions to reduce use and cost of out of borough B&B accommodation
- Used Local Lettings Policies on new developments to target homes at specific groups such as older people downsizing from family homes, working households and creating economically mixed communities
- Reviewed the Housing Register & Allocations Policy to allow more flexibility when allocating different types of property to ensure best use is made of the stock
- As a Council taken the lead role in the regeneration of Merstham and Preston estates to redevelop low demand accommodation, provide mixed tenure developments, new community facilities and recreational space.
- Worked with Raven Housing Trust to re-use low demand sheltered housing accommodation as temporary accommodation pending its redevelopment
- Worked with Raven Housing Trust to replace temporary accommodation no longer fit for purpose with high quality self-contained accommodation

Theme 5: Deliver Efficient Customer Focused Services

We have:

- Introduced new back office IT systems to streamline administration processes and improve case recording and document management
- Undertaken a Housing Service Review in 2015/16 to analyse processes, resources and causes of homelessness and have implemented changes to the staffing structure, new customer contact system and resourcing

- Taken part in a Diagnostic Peer Review of homelessness services with five Surrey authorities and passed the standard required to embark on the Gold Standard. We scored Fair to Good on all aspects of the homelessness service
- Continued to review our website to ensure it continues to be accessible, informative and relevant
- Agreed arrangements for sharing housing benefit and Council Tax information to deliver more efficient joined up services

5. Homelessness Prevention Tools

A number of tools are available to the housing service to use to prevent homelessness. Our tools range from tenant and landlord negotiation, to budget and affordability assessments, financial support to access private rented housing and referrals to specialist agencies and housing providers.

The Homelessness Review shows that the main cause of homelessness is the end of private rented accommodation. This is followed by parental eviction, then eviction by relatives / friends. We intend to develop the tools we have around the private rented sector with the aim of improving the sustainability of tenancies and securing more tenancies. One of the root causes of homelessness is financial instability and an increasing number of households facing significant debt. We offer some money advice, signpost to on-line self-help tools, national organisations and refer more complex cases to partner organisations such as Community Debt Advice and the CAB.

Below is a summary of the main tools that we have used and will continue to employ to prevent homelessness over the next five years.

5.1 Financial Support

- **Repossession Prevention Fund** – This funding is used in a variety of homelessness prevention initiatives including rent in advance, deposits, arrears, garden and rubbish clearance. It is a cost effective and flexible resource often used on lower value expenditure. In 2015/16 £28,000 was used to prevent 25 households becoming homeless. Wherever possible we recover monies spent by entering into repayment schemes and securing deposits in the Council's favour.
- **Discretionary Housing Payment fund (DHP)** – DHP is paid annually to the Council and managed by Housing Benefit in partnership with Housing Services. It is used to prevent homelessness through payments of rent in advance, tenancy deposit, assisting benefit capped cases, 'bedroom tax' cases and to provide short-term assistance to bridge Local Housing Allowance shortfalls whilst money advice is sought. Since 2013 the Council has spent the entire DHP fund each year.
- **Rent Guarantor Scheme** – This scheme guarantees the private rent for selected households facing homelessness but unable to secure a private rent home without a guarantor. We established the first guarantor scheme in Surrey and since 2014 eight households have been assisted.
- **Money Advice** – we refer households with complex money or debt problems to local organisations offering specialist services. We refer to the Citizens Advice Bureau and Community Debt Advice. Raven Housing Trust operates the MoneyWise advice service for its tenants and Parashoot also offers money advice to its clients.
- **Surrey Local Assistance Scheme** – this scheme can provide support for immediate needs in an emergency when no other options are available. The scheme can assist with food, emergency travel costs, keeping the family safe, essential furniture / white goods. We refer clients directly to the scheme and to Citizens Advice Bureau for assistance with applications.

5.2 Securing Accommodation and ongoing support

- **Rent Deposit Bond Guarantee Scheme** – This 15 year old scheme operated by NextStep YMCA East Surrey assists households, referred by the Council, into private rented accommodation. The scheme offers short-term rent deposit bonds, assists with sourcing private rented accommodation and setting up tenancies, undertakes financial assessments and provides support to tenants and landlords. The scheme secures an average of 50 tenancies a year.
- **Winter Night Shelter** - Operated by Renewed Hope Trust the shelter runs from December to March and is staffed by around 300 volunteers. It offers a bed, hot evening meal, breakfast, a packed lunch, clothing, a listening ear and signposting to other services. It is available to street homeless people with a local connection to the borough. In recent years the Shelter has included funding and referrals from Tandridge District Council.
- **East Surrey Outreach Support Service (eSOS)** – set up in 2015 eSOS assists rough sleepers and sofa surfers to manage their situation, access accommodation and services or reconnect with other areas or old networks. To date eSOS has assisted over 40 households of which just over half were successfully accommodated. Funding was secured from Government to operate the service for 18 months, additional funding has been made available by the partner Councils to extend the project for a short time. Other funding sources are being explored with the aim of enabling the service to continue to operate as well as enhancing it further.
- **Supported housing** – We continue to refer single people to supported housing providers within the borough and elsewhere as appropriate. The main providers in the borough are Transform Housing & Support, Sanctuary, Prospect Housing & Support Services, Wayside and YMCA East Surrey Hillbrook House. They offer accommodation to a range of client groups including young women, single under 30s, people with a learning disability, people with mental health issues / drug and / or alcohol issues.
- **Tenancy sustainment** - a Tenancy Advisor has been in post for the last two years working with private and social tenants and landlords to resolve tenancy and financial issues to prevent homelessness. Our priority is to save the tenancy but in situations where tenancies cannot be saved we offer housing options advice and assistance into alternative accommodation. The post has made a real difference to our ability to intervene earlier and avoid homelessness. It is an area of work we intend to expand.
- **Tenancy Support** – the Council refers households to a range of support providers. Providers include Parashoot, Transform Housing & Support, East Surrey Domestic Abuse Service, and Catalyst.
- **Domestic Abuse Sanctuary Scheme** – We continue to operate a joint working arrangement with East Surrey Domestic Abuse Outreach Scheme (ESDAS) and Tandridge and Mole Valley Councils to offer a Sanctuary Scheme for survivors of domestic abuse. The Council commits over £3,000 per year to support the scheme. On average 15 households a year are assisted to remain in their homes.

- **Surrey Mobility Scheme** – the Council remains committed to the joint working arrangement with the other Surrey authorities which assists survivors of domestic abuse to move within the county through reciprocal arrangements.

5.3 Inter-agency Groups

- **Multi-Agency Risk Assessment Committee (MARAC)** – the local area MARAC meets regularly to discuss how to help victims of domestic abuse at risk of serious harm. A range of organisations such as the police, adults and / or children’s services, social landlords attend. A representative from Housing Services attends to prevent homelessness and give advice and assistance on housing issues.
- **Multi-Agency Public Protection Arrangements (MAPPA)** – are monitored by housing services and updates given on relevant cases. The Surrey Housing Authorities work together to provide support and attendance at meetings.
- **Prolific and Priority Offenders (PPO) and Neighbourhood Prolific Offenders (NPO)** – In 2007/08 all Surrey local authorities signed up to the Offenders Protocol in conjunction with Probation and the Police. Where a PPO is willing to engage with the Council, we will offer a £500 rent deposit to help access private accommodation.
- **Community Incident Action Group (CIAG)** – this borough based group of professionals meets monthly to monitor and respond to issues of anti-social behaviour in the borough. Frequently there is a housing related issue to be addressed and a representative from the housing team attends.
- **Surrey Housing Needs Managers Group** - meets regularly and works collectively in a number of ways including: benchmarking performance; developing and providing joint district and borough services; developing protocols; joint working with other agencies and making joint bids for funding homelessness initiatives.
- **Surrey Chief Housing Officers Association** – meets regularly and works collectively in a number of ways including: to agree on Surrey wide strategic projects / issues. Arrange a yearly Surrey Local Authority & Registered Provider forum, agree joint lobbying of MP’s on issues as required.

5.4 Review of the Housing Service

During 2015/16 the Housing Service took part in two service reviews which looked in detail at the operation of the Housing Service, identified strengths and weaknesses, assessed priorities and outcomes of the Service.

A whole housing Service Review was undertaken first. The Service Review was triggered by the unsustainable cost of the Council’s response to homelessness. The Service Review looked at processes in the team, resources and causes of homelessness. It concluded with an action plan with objectives on preventing homelessness, improving client service and organisational efficiency. A number of improvements have been implemented including the shift of general enquiries to customer services, enhancement of the rent deposit scheme, appointment of a Service Manager and a new team structure.

The Housing Service also took part in a voluntary in depth review of our homelessness service. Called the Diagnostic Peer Review (DPR), this review was overseen by the National Practitioner Support Service (NPSS) for homelessness services. It is the precursor to the achievement of the Gold Standard in homelessness services. Ten challenges set by the NPSS are seen to be best practice in housing options and advice services:

The 10 Local Challenges

- 1 To adopt a corporate commitment to prevent homelessness which has buy in across all local authority services
 - 2 To actively work in partnership with voluntary sector and other local partners to address support, education, employment and training needs
 - 3 To offer a Housing Options prevention service to all clients including written advice
 - 4 To adopt a No Second Night Out model or an effective local alternative
 - 5 To have housing pathways agreed or in development with each key partner and client group that include appropriate accommodation and support
 - 6 To develop a suitable private rented sector offer for all clients groups, including advice and support to both client and landlord
 - 7 To actively engage in preventing mortgage repossessions including through the Mortgage Rescue Scheme
 - 8 To have a homelessness strategy which sets out a proactive approach to preventing homelessness and is reviewed annually to be responsive to emerging needs
 - 9 To not place any young person aged 16 or 17 in Bed and Breakfast accommodation
 - 10 To not place any families in Bed and Breakfast accommodation unless in an emergency and for no longer than 6 weeks
-

The Council has joined a group of Surrey authorities aiming for the 10 standards, the authorities have undertaken peer reviews of each other. All five of the Surrey authorities have completed the DPR which is stage one of the standard. To qualify to move on through the process all authorities had to score above 60% in it.

The DPR assessed the service through the following areas:

- Homeless Strategy overview
- Website review
- Reception and interview room assessment
- Customer interview observation
- Housing Option file reviews
- Homelessness assessment file review
- Staff interviews

- Manager interviews
- Partner agency interviews
- Visits
- Overall quality of Housing Options services

RBBC achieved an overall grade of 63%, scoring between 'Fair' and 'Good' (scores of 40% - 79%) highlighting that there were no major concerns that needed addressing in the service.

Top 3 marks			Lowest 3 marks	
Visits		75%	Homeless strategy overview	53%
Website Review		71%	Homelessness file review	52%
Customer observation	interview	69%	Housing Options file review	51%

A comprehensive action plan had been agreed with the Council. The Housing Options Service is now working on improving weaker areas of the service and has already made improvements to the service as a direct result of the DPR. Aspects of the DPR assessment have been integrated into this Strategy. Building on the success of the DPR the Service will be working on achieving the Gold Standard.

5.5 Financial Resources Available to Deliver the Strategy

The Council has invested resources from a range of funding streams into activities which have wholly or partly contributed to preventing homelessness and supporting vulnerable residents in housing need. The following is a summary of the most significant funding sources.

- **Discretionary Housing Payments (DHP)** - The Council has a strong record of utilising DHPs to prevent homelessness and has effective joint working arrangements between Housing Services and the Housing Benefit Team. A Manager in each team ensures the services work together effectively, share information and cooperate. If a household is identified as being at risk of homelessness due to rent problems for which a DHP might be payable, housing options staff request payment and the request is treated as a trusted referral.
- In 2014/15 over £63,000 of the £176,000 DHP Fund was used on Housing Options cases to prevent homelessness. Some funds were used to assist households affected by the 'bedroom tax', but the largest proportion was used to assist private rented tenants affected by Local Housing Allowance restrictions and to assist with rent deposits and advances. In 2015/16 over £74,000 of the total DHP Fund of £147,298 was used by Housing Options to prevent homelessness.
- **Homelessness Prevention Grant** - Local authorities received an annual Homelessness Prevention Grant from the DCLG. There is no transparent formula for assessing the amount of grant allocated to each local authority and there are wide variations in the amounts boroughs receive. From 2013/14 onwards the Council has received £57,146 per year. The grant is used on funding the housing service.
- **Repossession Prevention Fund** - The DCLG made a one-off payment in 2009 of £47,500 and topped this up by £30,000 in 2012. No further funding has been received from

the DCLG. Since 2012 the Housing Service has continued to use the fund until it ran out in 2016/17. A £20,000 top-up was provided by the Council's Corporate Plan Delivery Fund. The Housing Service uses this to prevent households becoming homeless by offering rent deposits, rent in advance, and resolving tenancy breaches such as garden / rubbish clearance. We aim to recycle this fund better in the future by entering into repayment agreements with clients.

- **Housing Related Support Grant** - Prior to 2011, Surrey County Council received annual 'Supporting People' funding. The ring fence on this fund was removed and grants to local government reduced. HRSG is currently being reviewed by the government and at the time of writing it is unclear what its future is and what impact any changes will have on borough services. Currently a grant continues to be used to provide Housing Related Support to vulnerable clients at risk of homelessness typically: young people, people with mental health support needs, frail older people with support needs, people with drug and alcohol problems, homeless people, people with physical or sensory disabilities and teenage parents.

Support is provided through either floating support services or through accommodation based services. The Housing Related Support Service works closely with service providers, accommodation providers and local authorities to monitor services to ensure they deliver positive outcomes. The Council attends provider assessment meetings and continues to influence commissioning priorities to ensure best use of available resources to meet needs. Given the current funding environment facing local authorities there is a risk the fund will be reduced.

- **Voluntary Sector Grant** - The Council continues to provide funding to voluntary sector organisations to deliver services in the borough. In terms of housing related support, the Council has provided core funding to the Citizens Advice Bureau for a number of years. In 2015/16 they were awarded £111,000 and awarded £104,000 in 2016/17.
- In 2016/17 Voluntary Sector Grants were also given to other housing related services. Furnistore who provide discounted household furniture, white goods and other household items received £1,000, The Reigate & Redhill Live at Home Scheme supporting older people to stay independent received £10,000 core funding and Women's Aid received £5,000.
- Housing Services contributes £3,000 per year to the Sanctuary Scheme operated by ESDAS, £2,000 per year to Renewed Hope Trust towards funding the Winter Night Shelter and £64,000 to the YMCA East Surrey NextStep Rent Deposit Bond Scheme.

5.6 Accessing External Funding Sources

Housing Services takes a pro-active approach to identifying funding sources that will support our homelessness toolkit and prevent homelessness. Successful partnerships that have brought additional resources include:

- Women's Aid Accommodation – Housing Services and Women's Aid made a joint bid to a DCLG Fund to support victims of domestic abuse. The joint bid secured £91,000 funding to provide additional accommodation.

- East Surrey Outreach Service (eSOS) – Housing Services along with Tandridge, Mole Valley and Epsom & Ewell Councils made a successful joint bid to the DCLG in 2015 to secure funding to set up the service. Funding expired in September 2016 and the four LA's along with a successful bid to the Police & Crime Commissioner secured funding until the end of March 2017. Future funding is being sought.

6. Homelessness Review Summary

A detailed review of homelessness in the borough has been completed and is available in a separate publication. It contains comprehensive information on trends in homelessness including causes of homelessness, household types, priority categories, prevention and the tools used to prevent homelessness. Below is a summary of the Review.

Borough background

At 138,000 Reigate and Banstead has the highest population in Surrey and has seen the largest population growth during 2001 and 2009. Unemployment is not a major issue in the borough and as of April 2016 0.7% of the population claimed Job Seekers Allowance compared to 1.1% in the South East. In general the borough is a prosperous area, however there are small areas in the borough experiencing higher levels of deprivation. The Preston ward is ranked 6th and Merstham 10th most deprived out of the 206 Surrey wards. These areas are the focus of regeneration activities. The borough falls just outside the least 10% deprived in the country and ranks as the 4th most deprived in Surrey.

Homelessness trends

- The most common cause of homelessness is the loss of rented / tied accommodation due to an Assured Shortfall Tenancy (AST) termination making up 30% of all accepted homeless households.
- The second most common cause of homelessness is parental eviction (22%) and third most common reason eviction by friends / relatives (14%).
- The main priority category during the last 5 years has been households with dependent children making up 74% of all accepted homeless applicants.
- 'Lone parents with dependent children' is the most common homeless household type at 51% during the last 5 years.
- There are two common gender themes within homeless household types; a total of 95% of applicants that fell under the 'Lone parent with dependent children' category are female applicants; whereas 70% of applicants in 'One person households' are male applicants.
- The 25-44 age group is the most common age group of accepted homeless households reflecting the majority age group of the overall borough population.
- A total of 82% of accepted homeless applicants fall under the White ethnicity category largely reflecting the 90.6% White population of the borough.

Homelessness prevention

- Including non-statutory homeless households, over 1,200 households were prevented from becoming homeless over the last 5 years through successful advice and assistance.
- A total of 72% of households were prevented from becoming homeless through assistance to obtain alternative accommodation
- 28% were able to remain in their existing home as a result of our interventions.
- The most frequently used alternative housing option is assistance into the private rented sector which forms 34% of all alternative housing options.

7. Homelessness Strategy 2017-21

Our priority objective over the next five years is to prevent homelessness and sustain tenancies. The borough has some of the highest housing costs in the country outside of London. This brings significant pressure on residents and local workers, which in turn puts pressure on our housing and homelessness service. We will continue to use a variety of tools to prevent homelessness and accept this will be a challenge in the face of increasing rental costs and welfare reform.

There is a strong corporate commitment to tackling the causes of homelessness and directing resources to tackle them. The Housing Service is now in a good position to respond to the challenges and deliver a service that makes a positive difference to those facing housing difficulty.

8. Objective 1: Prevent homelessness and sustain tenancies

The Council is committed to providing an effective homelessness service in which prevention is the priority. Our aim is to prevent homelessness by giving advice and assistance at the earliest sign of housing insecurity, providing support to sustain tenancies and referring to specialist schemes and services when needed.

Homelessness from the private rented sector is increasing. The borough has a buoyant private rented market in which there is no shortage of potential tenants and this means it is a challenge to secure lower cost private rented accommodation. We work with clients and our partners to source accommodation in and out of the borough and to sustain these tenancies.

We use a variety of tools to avoid homelessness. Following a review of the Housing Service and the Diagnostic Peer Review of the homelessness service we have implemented a number of changes to our team structure and service operation to strengthen our homeless response.

The Council's Customer Service Team is now the first point of contact for queries about housing register applications and general housing queries. This has enabled the growth of our tenancy sustainment services. Over the next year we will be able to offer more households tenancy sustainment support and will aim to intervene at an earlier stage of housing difficulty for more households.

Priority 1: Provide a housing options prevention service to all clients

Any household in need of housing advice is able to access the Housing Advice Self-Help Tool. This on-line tool, which provides information about housing options, is available anytime. Advice is given on a number of housing topics together with contact details of specialist organisations and services. A written summary of advice is produced for each user. Information is updated regularly to ensure it remains relevant. Alongside the Tool is a series of quick access on-line housing fact sheets on the most common housing issues.

We provide a great deal of telephone advice and we do send information as appropriate as well as directing clients to on-line resources. We are working towards providing tailored written advice to every customer. All clients who attend a Housing Options appointment are given written advice. We will be implementing personal action plans for housing options and housing register applicants in early 2016/17.

We recognise it is important to capture the volume and nature of telephone queries and have reviewed our practices to record basic details of all contact via phone or email on a customer service database. This means we can record more accurately the volume, reason for contacts and outcomes and refine our response and target resources appropriately.

Homelessness prevention is at the core of our activities. Our tenancy advisor staff and housing options officers offer advice and assistance to social housing tenants, private rented tenants and homeowners to prevent them losing their homes. Clients are assisted to avoid or resolve mortgage debt and repossession, to exercise their rights and responsibilities as tenants and to avoid legal and illegal eviction. Our team is able to offer assistance with court hearings to prevent homelessness.

Money management problems are a recurring theme among the households seeking housing advice. An increasing proportion of households have inadequate budgeting skills, have taken on loans and credit that they cannot sustain and as a result either fail to pay rent or consider their housing unaffordable. Our Tenancy Sustainment and Housing Options services identify money problems and work with clients to find a way forward to prevent homelessness. Referrals are also made to Community Debt Advice (CDA), a local money service. CDA works intensively with households to manage debt and importantly develop essential budgeting skills. Households are also referred to the Citizen Advice Bureau money advice service.

Money advice is an area in which we intend to develop more expertise so we can offer a more comprehensive service to clients. We also intend to use social media to promote positive messages about the benefits of getting smart about money management.

Every tenancy has two parties and many of our private landlords are inexperienced, own a single property and need support. We also offer advice to landlords. Through liaison and negotiation we often reach agreement on a way forward to avoid eviction, improve landlord / tenant relations and sustain the tenancy. The positive engagement of landlords has increased greatly as a result of our tenancy sustainment approach. Furthermore, the enhanced NextStep scheme will offer more advice and information to landlords and will support the Council to hold bi-annual landlord forums.

Strategic Actions:

- Improve the functionality, take up and effectiveness of a Housing Options Self-Help Tool
- Explore opportunities to have a dedicated money advice service
- Undertake a targeted financial awareness campaign through social media channels to raise awareness of financial responsibility, budgeting skills and help services
- Set up a Homeless Forum to strengthen information sharing, dialogue and partnership working with a range of organisations providing services to our clients

Priority 2: Ensure clients are referred to support services to get into housing or sustain their current housing

Many of the households we work with have support needs, others need assistance getting basic household items or food. We are able to refer to schemes that provide support with living skills and to schemes providing practical assistance.

Households in need of furniture and other household goods are referred to the local charity Furnistore. They have a range of furniture items and white goods available. We also refer families with young children to the East Surrey based charity Stripey Stork for assistance with equipment and clothing for babies and young children.

The Local Assistance Scheme is available in an emergency situation and can help with one or more of a range of things such as essential furniture and / or white goods, emergency travel costs, keeping the family safe and food. Four foodbanks operate locally, St Matthew's in Redhill, Methodist Church in Horley and Loveworks in Merstham and Baptist Church in Woodhatch. Households are referred to them by the Council and other agencies.

The East Surrey Family Support Service has been developed to provide a holistic service to 'troubled families' with a history of anti-social behaviour, worklessness and / or poor school

attendance. The South East Surrey Team supports households in this borough, Tandridge and Mole Valley and is co-located with Housing Services. The Support Team works with a range of agencies from the statutory and voluntary sector to help families combat unemployment, poor school attendance, financial barriers and anti-social behaviour. It aims to break the cycle for future generations. The Support Team works closely with Housing Services to support households facing housing insecurity, to prevent homelessness and sustain tenancies.

Housing Services works closely with a number of partner organisations who can provide tenancy support to households in difficulty. Referrals are made to Parashoot, a Raven Housing Trust and Prospect Housing operated tenancy support service. Parashoot is available to single people, couples and families from all communities including people with mental health, alcohol or drug problems regardless of their tenure. The service supports people at risk of losing their home or who are homeless and need somewhere to live. Parashoot has assisted many households referred by the Council to avoid homelessness.

A number of households seeking assistance need accommodation based support. We make referrals to a range of supported housing providers in the borough and work in partnership to offer a joined up service. YMCA East Surrey provides accommodation to young people in housing difficulty. We refer single people to the YMCA and have provided financial support for the development of additional move-on accommodation. We also refer single women to the Wayside Hostel which offers accommodation and support to homeless young women. Single people with more complex support needs are referred to Transform Housing & Support. Transform is able to provide dedicated support and / or accommodation to people with learning disabilities, mental health, drug, alcohol or offending issues with the aim of assisting people to live more independently.

We are mindful of the challenges facing supported housing providers in the face of reduced Housing Related Support Grant from Surrey County Council and uncertainty regarding the potential cap on housing costs. Supported housing is often the only housing option for individuals with more challenging issues or needing higher levels of support. We are committed to working with providers to identify the service impacts of loss of rental income and how we can assist them.

Operating alongside these direct services is a network of multi-agency meetings where support for individuals and the community are coordinated. These include MARAC meetings for victims of domestic abuse; PPO meetings for priority prolific offenders and the monthly Community Incident Action Group (CIAG). These meetings are attended by a range of organisations that include Raven Housing Trust, the Council, the Police, Adult Social Care, Children's Services, Community Mental Health Recovery Service and Surrey Alcohol and Drug Advisory Service. These meetings are well attended and have led to a strong coordinated multi-agency approach to resolving issues that avoids duplication.

Strategic action:

- Work with partners to identify and support the most vulnerable clients to prevent homelessness
- Work with supported housing providers to manage the impacts of reduced Housing Related Support Grant and potential changes to cap housing benefits
- Establish a supported housing referral panel to assess potential clients needs and jointly agree a housing pathway

Priority 3: Ensure victims of domestic abuse are referred to support services and given timely advice and assistance

Homelessness caused by fleeing a violent relationship (from a partner or associated person) accounted for 10% of all accepted homeless applicants during the period 2011-2016. The number of calls received by Housing Services regarding domestic abuse has increased. We provide practical advice and assistance to victims based on their situation. East Surrey Domestic Abuse Service (ESDAS) can assist with obtaining Non-Molestation Orders, Occupation Orders as well as referring to the Sanctuary Scheme. We will contact Housing Providers where a victim is a social housing tenant and discuss options for an emergency move.

In situations where a client wishes to leave the area we will assist with sourcing refuge placements on behalf of victims and give contact details for the 24 hour National Domestic Abuse Helpline and/or National Centre for Domestic Abuse (NCDV). We also have comprehensive information in the Housing Options Toolkit, on our website and a housing fact sheet. We work closely with Women's Aid. Recently we worked on a successful joint bid to secure additional resources from the Department for Communities and Local Government to provide additional accommodation. In some situations we are able to refer to the Sanctuary Scheme which, following a risk assessment, installs security measures. In the last year we have improved the recording of data on this group and now record refuge placements and enquiries to gain a better understanding of this issue.

Strategic Action:

- Monitor the number of enquiries from victims of domestic abuse, ensure housing service staff are trained to recognise and respond appropriately to victims

Priority 4: Provide support and assistance to single homeless people

Support is available to single homeless people through a small network of organisations. Renewed Hope Trust operates a Drop-In service to people who are homeless, lonely or disadvantaged. The scheme operates three days in the summer and five days in the winter offering a lunch meal, Foodbank tokens, an advocacy service, support and services in partnership with a number of organisations, as well as work experience for ex-offenders.

East Surrey Outreach Service (eSOS) works with street homeless people to offer advice and support, referrals to other agencies and re-connection with friends, family in the area they left. Operated in partnership with Mole Valley, Epsom & Ewell and Tandridge Councils and Stoneham Housing Association the scheme is based on the No Second Night Out principles.

A winter night shelter for the street homeless is operated by Renewed Hope Trust. Moving between different venues it is operated by volunteers and supported financially by local churches, individuals, the Council and Tandridge District Council. The Shelter provides transport to the venue, a hot meal, clothing and personal hygiene kits, a bed for the night in a safe and friendly environment and signposting to other support services. The operation of the shelter relies on donated venues. Renewed Hope Trust continues to search for a premise that can offer a permanent base for the shelter and associated services.

YMCA East Surrey and Wayside Hostel continue to provide supported housing to young homeless people. Older single people are referred to other services such as Transform Housing. We also refer single people to Vision Housing who can source private rented accommodation outside of the

borough. All single homeless household are made a minimum offer of £500 towards securing private rented accommodation.

Strategic Action:

- Secure further resources to enable the No Second Night Out local scheme eSOS to take on the No First Night Out approach and continue to operate across East Surrey
- Investigate the options for securing a more permanent direct access hostel for homeless people.

9. Objective 2: Increase the supply of private rented accommodation available to people at risk of homelessness

The availability of private rented sector housing is crucial to managing demand and preventing homelessness. It can offer a flexible housing option for households who cannot afford to buy a home, need a quick housing solution, or face a long wait for an offer of social housing. The Council's use of out of borough homeless emergency accommodation for homeless households has increased in recent years and is not sustainable in the longer term for the Council or the households placed there.

Over the next few years we need to increase our access to the private rented sector. This will be a challenge given the demand for private rented housing, rising rents, fixed local housing allowance rates and changes to the taxation of private landlords. We currently support the YMCA East Surrey NextStep Rent Deposit Scheme to assist families at risk of or homeless to access private rented accommodation. NextStep assists around 50 households per year to secure homes.

Single people also face challenges to secure private rented accommodation. Within the borough there are only 23 Registered Houses in Multiple Occupation. We are aware anecdotally a much larger number of properties are rented on a room share basis, these units are not subject to regulation. We are able to offer £500 towards securing private rented accommodation for single people or couples. Under 35 single people living in the private rented sector who seek housing benefit support or apply for universal credit are restricted to receiving the LHA shared room rate. From 2018, the shared room rate will be extended to social housing tenants and will apply to tenancies starting in 2016.

Finding a suitable private rented home is only part of the challenge for the households we assist. Many have difficulty securing the deposit and rent in advance and increasingly letting agents and landlords require guarantors where household income is below a specified level. We need initiatives and resources to assist households into private rented housing where the only barrier is the initial tenancy set up cost.

Our Housing Review shows that homelessness caused by the loss of private rented accommodation is the most common cause (30%) in the borough. We have a balancing act between accessing this tenure to prevent homelessness and also managing homelessness from this sector. We cannot rely on the supply of enough affordable or social rent homes for everyone who is at risk of homelessness. Private renting offers some households a longer term solution, depending on the motivation of the landlord and for others it provides a short-term option pending a change in their circumstances, while savings for homeownership or while waiting for an offer of affordable housing through the Housing Register.

Priority 1: Improve access to suitable private rented accommodation for households at risk of homelessness or experiencing homelessness

A key priority for the Council's Housing Service is to expand and enhance the existing NextStep rent deposit scheme to achieve a reduction in B&B expenditure and increase the number of homeless prevention outcomes.

The existing NextStep Scheme secures around 50 tenancies a year. NextStep is able to offer support to households who find a property but need assistance with setting up the tenancy. NextStep offers assistance with DHP applications, benefit applications and signing up of the

tenancy. This helps to smooth the tenancy process, builds our client's confidence and connects landlords to the NextStep service.

The enhanced scheme will be piloted for 18 months and will aim to double the number of households assisted into private rented housing. The enhanced NextStep scheme includes an enhanced offer to tenants and new offer to landlords. Tenants will be offered greater assistance to find suitable accommodation by a new staff member dedicated to sourcing properties. The location of properties will extend outside the borough so that a range of affordable homes can be secured. This will also contribute to helping households take advantage of employment opportunities elsewhere. Tenants will be offered more tenancy support with the aim of sustaining tenancies for longer. Support will link closely with the activities the Council and our partners are undertaking to manage the impacts of welfare reform. Some tenants will also benefit from a more attractive tenancy bond which will remove the upfront cost of providing a cash deposit.

The enhanced NextStep scheme also aims to attract more landlords to the service and will undertake an advertising campaign to attract them from a wider geographical area. NextStep already offers free tenant introductions, photographic inventories and tenancy support to tenants and landlords. The new scheme will enable landlords to benefit from additional support provided to tenants by reducing tenancy breakdowns. The scheme will also be able to offer landlords a wider range of options for tenancy deposits and bonds, including lifetime bonds in some cases if appropriate. The promotion of good practice and advice will be offered to landlords on a range of matters through bi-annual landlord forums.

Currently, the Council is able to offer financial assistance towards deposits, rent in advance and has piloted a rent guarantor scheme to prevent homelessness. Housing Services works closely with the Benefits Team to maximise the use of DHPs for rent in advance, deposits, assisting households subject to the Total Benefit Cap, bedroom tax cases and providing short term 'top ups' to households with rents above the Local Housing Allowance rate.

Housing Services also provides financial assistance through loans and grants towards deposits and rent in advance from its Repossession Prevention Fund. This Fund is limited and relies on the repayment of loans and deposits. We plan to develop a scheme to improve repayment rates through the offer of interest free loans for rent in advance, deposits and rent / mortgage arrears. This will enable us to assist more households.

At the end of 2014 a pilot Rent Guarantor Scheme was set up by the Council. Aimed at financially low risk households facing homelessness, the scheme enables the Council to agree to act as a rent guarantor. It assisted five households in 2015 and a further four households in 2016. The scheme is monitored by our Tenancy Advisors who provide advice to households to help them maintain their tenancies.

Strategic Action:

- Operate an 18 month enhanced NextStep Rent Deposit Scheme pilot to secure an additional 75 new private sector tenancies.
- Secure continued funding of the Repossession Prevention Fund and implement recovery measures such as interest free loans to enable the money provided through the fund to be recycled to assist more households
- Continue to operate the Rent Guarantor Scheme for suitable households at risk of homelessness and share good practice with other Councils.

10. Objective 3: Work in partnership to minimise the impact of welfare reform on our residents and improve access to employment opportunities for people in housing need and at risk of homelessness

The government is continuing its programme of welfare reform as part of its deficit reduction strategy. Changes arising out of the programme have affected the ability of some of our borough residents to meet their housing costs and will continue to do so. The most significant reform implemented to date in the borough has been the Total Benefit Cap (TBC). This two stage reduction affected a relatively small group of residents in the first round but affected a larger group in the second round further reducing their ability to meet housing costs. Universal Credit is expected to be rolled out in the borough in 2018. It will bring a number of challenges.

The Council has put in place a Welfare Reform working group working with affected households. Our focus is on maximising income, managing money, helping people find employment and signposting to agencies able to assist with employment advice. The emphasis of advice is on employment because this is the most sustainable way for households to manage the impacts of welfare reform.

The welfare benefits system continues to be subject to change and we need to work with borough residents and partner agencies to minimise the negative effects and help households make positive changes in their lives. The solutions vary depending on the individual circumstances of households and therefore we need to ensure we take a flexible and responsive approach.

Priority 1: Deliver a multi-agency support service to assist residents affected by welfare reform to prevent homelessness.

The Council's housing benefit team is proactively contacting households significantly affected by welfare reform. Households are visited and offered advice and information to understand the impacts on their household and how to maximise their household income. The benefits of getting into employment to mitigate the impacts of welfare changes are discussed together and referrals made to other agencies. Support is given to apply to the Discretionary Housing Fund. The aim of our approach is to:

- Mitigate the worst effects of welfare reform
- Improve pathways to jobs for families and young unemployed people
- Provide information about childcare options to help tackle affordability and enable parents to take up employment
- Work with local employers to identify work ready individuals for new and expanding businesses
- Work with partners such as Community Debt Advice, Citizens Advice Bureau and Raven HT to offer money management and debt advice

The Council assisted 36 households affected by the Total Benefit Cap in phase 1 through assistance into employment, ensuring they accessed all appropriate benefits, providing budgeting advice and signposting to partner agencies providing money and employment advice. The lower Total Benefit Cap, which came into effect in November 2016, affected 182 households. It has left more households with a significant shortfall between their income and housing costs.

As a result of our contact with affected households some households have increased their working hours to exempt them from the Benefit Cap and other non-working households are preparing for employment. Income maximisation is an important aspect of our advice including ensuring lone parents apply for child maintenance payments from absent parents. For many affected households securing childcare remains an issue. We have prepared advice packs and information on how to find suitable childcare. Jobcentre Plus in Redhill is working in partnership with the Council and assigned three Jobcentre coaches to work with households in the borough affected by the Benefit Cap.

It will be a significant challenge to deliver a high volume of positive outcomes for welfare reform affected households in the context of a further reduction in the Benefit Cap, the roll out of full Universal Credit and other welfare reforms. We remain committed to assisting households to manage the impacts of welfare reform and manage their housing costs.

Strategic Actions:

- Work in partnership to minimise homelessness arising from welfare reform through the provision of on going advice and support to affected households

Priority 2: Work in partnership to maximise access to employment and prevent homelessness

Our experience shows a direct link between unemployment and risk of homelessness. Research by Raven Housing Trust has found that over 80 per cent of homeless household families housed by them are unemployed or economically inactive. Welfare reform is having a significant impact on families who are economically inactive and will place those most affected by changes in their income at risk of homelessness.

The borough is an area of high employment. Our aim is to help households overcome barriers to employment and support those entering employment. The East Surrey Pathway to Employment project aims to target people facing housing insecurity to move closer to the job market or into work. It is a multi-agency project that will provide intensive, targeted, wrap-around support on an individual basis.

All project beneficiaries will have to be facing housing insecurity such as living in temporary accommodation, been served a repossession notice or be fleeing / or have had to flee domestic abuse. Raven's experience and research has identified a high percentage of homeless families they have accommodated are not in work, are likely to have chaotic lifestyles and experience a number of barriers or perceived barriers to getting into employment.

The project will offer a programme of individually tailored support from building self-confidence to CV writing, interview skills and in-work support. The project covers East Surrey and North Sussex and supports people located in pockets of deprivation including Redhill West and Merstham. The project aims are two-fold. Firstly, to increase the numbers of people with multiple barriers to employment moving into active job searching and entering the workplace by addressing the basic skills deficit of the unemployed / inactive people. The second aim is to help local employers who need to grow their businesses in a high employment area but cannot recruit.

In 2016 the project engaged Sainsbury's Redhill to offer 100 jobs in their expanded supermarket. The project offers free support and training to get 'work ready' and open day events.

Growing new businesses

The Council has a strong commitment to supporting local business and encouraging a vibrant local economy. It operates schemes to assist people to set up their own small businesses. Many of the schemes are aimed at people who are unemployed. The aim is to help people turn their ideas into reality by offering practical advice and information about setting up a business. Our experience shows that housing security is linked to employment. The Business Engagement Team aims to help people make the transition into successful self employment.

Working with a range of partners including Redhill Jobcentre the 'Let's do Business' programme offers interested people referred by a number of organisations a two day training course about how to set up a business. It gives practical advice and support on all aspects of setting up a business including how to produce a business plan, marketing, finance and offers mentoring.

The Council also runs an annual 'Entrepreneur Academy' with East Surrey College. The academy provides an opportunity for interested parties to gain the skills needed to set up a business, including business planning, finance, marketing, legal information and online business promotion. It is free to attend and runs once a month for 6 months each year. Students get the opportunity to enter a 'Dragon's Den' style competition and win £5,000 to help get their business up and running. The academy has run for four years and a number of students have gone on to launch successful businesses.

As well as training, the Council also offers Business Support Grants of up to £1,000 to people setting up or looking to grow small businesses. Match funded grants have been provided to a range of small businesses such as window cleaners, mobile spray tanning salons and other grass roots businesses.

Monthly free Learning Lunches are held at the Town Hall. They give the opportunity to hear an informative speaker and network. Topics include Social Media Facebook for Business, mystery shopping, branding, 'must read' newsletter writing.

Strategic Actions:

- Provide support to deliver the Pathway to Employment project to assist households in housing insecurity get closer to work and prevent homelessness
- Work with partners to provide support to assist unemployed people to develop their business ideas and move into paid work and prevent homelessness

Priority 3: Prepare for the implementation of Universal Credit, working with partners to develop support for affected vulnerable residents

We have already taken a number of measures to assist households affected by welfare reform. Under Universal Credit, which is subject to a national roll out programme due to be implemented in the borough in summer 2018, working age households receive a single monthly payment directly from the DWP. This single payment will include an element for housing costs. Households are expected to pay their landlord rent from this single payment. This is a significant change for many social housing tenant claimants and some private tenants because previously housing benefit was paid direct to their landlord. Payments will only be made direct to landlords in situations where households are categorised as vulnerable and / or where a household has fallen into 8 weeks arrears.

There are a number of concerns about some household's ability to manage a large single monthly payment, budget and prioritise bills and living expenses. There is also the potential for increased rent arrears and ultimately more homelessness. Direct payments to landlords can be activated through application to the DWP when a household has reached 8 weeks of arrears. Our concern is that this level of arrears marks the point at which many landlords would issue a Notice of Seeking Possession.

Initiatives to assist households to manage money, deal with debt and budget effectively will have an important role in the prevention of homelessness. The voluntary sector currently provides welfare benefits advice and debt management assistance. These services receive a high volume of referrals from the Council and other agencies and are likely to face increasing pressure as the impacts of welfare reform and universal credit accumulate. Our aim is to offer money advice within the housing service to tackle affordability issues before they lead to housing insecurity.

Social landlords are already responding to the pressures upon household's incomes brought by welfare reform in a number of ways. Many have set up money advice and housing support initiatives offering advice and practical assistance to tenants facing financial difficulties. Social landlords routinely undertake affordability assessments of households being offered a tenancy. Increasingly social landlords are requesting rent in advance and this varies from a payment of a week to a month's rent. More homes offered by social landlords are set at affordable rent levels and typically the rents are unaffordable to unemployed / economically active households subject to the Total Benefit Cap.

Strategic Aims:

- Housing services to participate in the development of local arrangements for implementation of Universal Credit to minimise the risk of homelessness arising from benefit change.
- Identify resources to deliver more money advice services in partnership with the voluntary sector and other local partners

11. Objective 4: Reduce the use of bed and breakfast accommodation

This is a significant challenge. We have an increasing number of households approaching as homeless or threatened with homelessness. Legislation is clear that households with children should not be placed in non self-contained bed & breakfast (B&B) accommodation for longer than six weeks. We have been placing homeless households in self-contained emergency accommodation outside of the borough for a number of years. However, this is not economically or socially sustainable.

Legislation allows Council's to discharge the homeless duty into the private rented sector. To date we have made little progress using this power, but we intend to exercise it more frequently in the future. To avoid the use of self-contained B&Bs we have invested £1.4 million of affordable housing planning contributions in purchasing properties in the borough. The Council has brought into use eight homes as temporary accommodation. Our aim is to increase the number of temporary accommodation units in the borough over the next two years and reduce our expenditure on private B&B accommodation.

As well as providing temporary accommodation, we need to ensure that other tenures are available. NextStep already operates a private rental deposit scheme which we have committed to enhancing. A supply of affordable rented housing also needs to be maintained to meet the growing demand for housing in the borough. The Council has committed through the Core Strategy to deliver an additional 100 affordable housing units per year over the next 15 years. A steady stream of new build affordable housing is provided in the borough by housing association partners and the target is being achieved.

The largest supply of affordable rented housing comes from vacancies within the existing housing stock. This is an important resource for managing the pressures of homelessness. The Council has responded to the powers given to local authorities by the Localism Act 2011 to set locally defined housing register policy. The Council has reviewed the Housing Register & Allocation Policy twice since the Act. More recently, the 2015 review amended the local connection priority, reviewed priority bands, and community contribution rules. In recognition of the increased use of private rented accommodation, the bands were reviewed to allow private rented tenants to join the register where a tenancy was held for under four years. On average the council nominates households to around 310 affordable / social rented tenancies per year of which around 13% are sheltered housing tenancies.

Priority 1: Assist homeless households owed a re-housing duty into suitable private rented accommodation

The Localism Act 2011 introduced a new power to enable local authorities to discharge the homelessness duty by the offer of suitable private rented accommodation. This aims to give local authorities more flexibility in responding to homelessness. It also reduces the time spent in emergency accommodation and costs of providing it. However, the power is only effective if there is a supply of suitable private rented accommodation and the Council has made very limited use of this power.

A priority for the Housing Service is for the enhanced NextStep Rent Deposit Scheme to attract more landlords and increase homeless prevention through a greater supply of private rented accommodation. One aspect of this service will be securing homes into which the Council can

discharge the homelessness duty. To exercise this duty homes must be available for at least a year and meet an agreed standard. We accept that this is not appropriate for every homeless household. We will work closely with NextStep to exercise this power effectively. NextStep will also work closely with the Council's Environmental Health Team to improve standards in private sector housing.

Strategic Action:

- Work in partnership with NextStep to discharge the Council's homelessness duty into suitable private rented accommodation.

Priority 2: Provide more temporary accommodation in the borough to reduce the use of out of borough placements

Use of out of borough emergency accommodation has risen sharply in the last few years. As a consequence expenditure has reached an unsustainable level. In 2016 we set a target to have no more than 25 households in B&B accommodation on a Friday night. This has been a real challenge to maintain as the numbers of households approaching us has remained high. We have purchased a small number of properties in the borough for use as temporary accommodation and they have started to reduce pressure on the use of B&Bs.

Our aim is to bring our use of out of borough B&Bs to a minimum. We intend to provide temporary accommodation in the borough and aim to deliver around 25 units over the next few years. The units will be managed directly by the Council. We will be able to offer a proactive management service that works closely with the Benefits Team, Welfare Reform group, Family Support Service and other agencies to prepare households for the next housing move. The acquisition of the units will be funded by affordable housing planning contributions.

Strategic Action:

- Reduce the use of out of borough emergency accommodation through the acquisition of Council owned temporary accommodation in the borough

12. Consultation

A series of consultation opportunities have taken place to inform the strategy. We have consulted staff across the organisation and a range of external partners.

This Homelessness Strategy has evolved directly from the Housing Service Review. The Service Review explored the operation of the services and future direction. A series of workshops were held with the housing team to discuss the strategic direction of the service, preventing homelessness, improving client contact and organisational efficiency. The input of team staff to the workshops and outputs have helped shape the objectives and actions in this Strategy.

Informal consultations have taken place with the Portfolio for People & Welfare, Executive Members as well as an all Member Briefing workshop.

Separate consultation workshops were held with our partners and internal staff across departments to discuss the strengths and weaknesses of the service and discuss priorities. The partner workshops were attended by accommodation and service providers. The feedback on the homelessness service was positive with our partners commenting on the good communication they had with the service, the quality of referrals to their services enabling quick informed decisions, the proactive use of the DHP Fund, the guarantor scheme and rent in advance have been positive schemes. Overall the work the housing service undertakes on accessing private rented accommodation is helpful to their clients.

An on-line survey also took place. It attracted a small number of responses from a variety of organisations. It showed there was overall support for the objectives with very strong support for the East Surrey Outreach Service for rough sleepers, money advice services and for the Council developing its own emergency accommodation in the borough.

13. Financing and Resourcing the Strategy and Action Plan

All roles in the team contribute to the homelessness service so it is not possible to provide a definitive cost for the homelessness service alone so a housing service level budget approach is applied.

The cost of providing RBBC's housing service has risen in recent years. The 2015/16 annual budget was set at £673,000. The actual expenditure was £1,081,00. Net spend of £563,000 on emergency bed and breakfast accommodation was linked to just over half of this overspend. The budget has been re-sized for 2016/17 to £924,000 which is a realistic budget that reflects the increased pressures from homelessness households but is still challenging and is linked to the implementation of a range of initiatives aimed at reducing homelessness. The budget will be reviewed annually, with the aim to reduce it once the strategic actions are operational. Additional budget has been agreed to trial an enhanced rent deposit bond scheme for 18 months and to deliver the eSOS service until March 2017.

One of the initiatives aimed at reducing B&B expenditure is the development of Council owned temporary accommodation in the borough. This will reduce reliance on expensive out of borough B&B accommodation. The capital costs of the temporary accommodation will be met by affordable housing planning contributions.

The Service has access to two grant funds used to prevent homelessness. The housing service continues to make use of around £70,000 of the £140,000 DHP fund to assist households at risk of homelessness. DHP is used for rent deposits, rent in advance and bridging affordability gaps.

Some years ago the Council received two single grant payments for homelessness prevention work. The Council ring fenced this grant into the Repossession Prevention Fund (RPF). In 2015/16 the use of £28,000 prevented 25 households from becoming homeless. The Fund is used to pay for rent in advance, deposits and rent arrears when the DHP cannot be used. The Fund has also been used to clear gardens and rubbish to avoid homelessness. Rent deposits are repaid back to the fund so a proportion of the Fund is recycled. In September 2016 the fund ran out and was increased by £20,000 from the Corporate Plan Delivery Fund. In recognition of the valuable contribution that the RPF makes to prevent homelessness, the Council has committed to continue funding the RPF.

The housing service also contributes funding to other organisations that provide homelessness prevention services. The Council funds the NextStep Rent Deposit Scheme £64,000 annually. A £3,000 contribution is made to East Surrey Domestic Abuse Service for the Sanctuary Scheme. A contribution of £2,000 is also made to Renewed Hope Trust towards the Winter Night Shelter.

Staffing resources were reviewed in 2016/17 following the Housing Services Review. The staffing structure has changed and is better able to respond to the homelessness challenges facing the borough. A Housing Services Manager is now in place, a Tenancy Team Leader has been appointed and an additional Tenancy Advisor has been appointed.

14. Reviewing the Strategy

The Homelessness Strategy will be reviewed annually to assess our progress in meeting the identified actions. The social housing sector is facing unprecedented change and we must be flexible enough to be able to respond by shifting our focus and resources as required.