Housing Report

Overview & Scrutiny
21st January 2016

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Introduction

- Social housing is a fast changing sector

- Homelessness is increasing

- Ways that we are dealing with homelessness

- Taking a corporate approach to tackling this issue

Social housing is changing

- End of 10 year rent settlement and implementation of an annual 1% rent reduction over the next four years

Housing & Planning Bill

- Tenants earning over £30k will be charged near market rents

- Extension of the Right to Buy to housing associations

- Starter Homes to be defined as affordable housing

Welfare Reform

- Reduction on benefit cap from £26,000 to £20,000

- Roll out of Universal Credit

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Homelessness in Reigate – counting the cost

- Surrey continues to experience increasing levels of homelessness and approaches to Councils for help

- Our annual expenditure on B&B accommodation increased from £25,000 in 2008/09 to a projected overspend of £348,000 in 2015/16

- During 2015 we regularly housed up to 30 households in emergency accommodation – in both traditional B&B and self-contained units for families with dependent children

- A lack of local emergency accommodation means families moving out of the local area, as legally the Council must not keep families with children in non-self contained accommodation over 6 weeks

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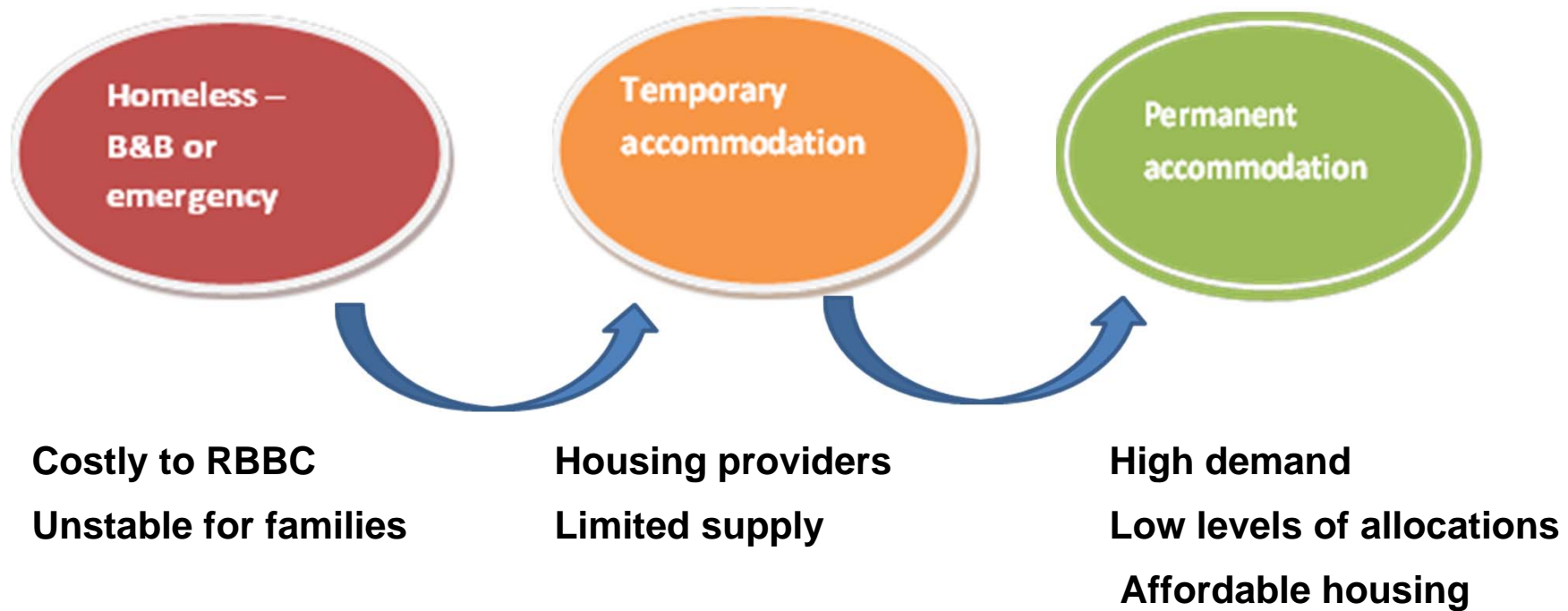Banstead | Horley | Redhill | Reigate

How we prevent homelessness now

- <u>Prevention</u> – we have a dedicated officer who deals with tenancy sustainment with the aim of preventing families from losing their homes

- We provide telephone, web and face to face housing advice and negotiate with all parties and agencies to find a way forward

- <u>Using the private sector</u> – by making use of our Discretionary Housing Payments fund, we have been able to help a number of families to rent privately, through paying for rent in advance and deposits

- We maintain good relationships with local letting agents and fund work with NextStep at YMCA to secure and maintain private tenancies

- We are one of the first Councils to set up a guarantor scheme, to secure accommodation in the private sector

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If prevention fails or there is no opportunity to prevent

- When a person or family approach the Council as homeless, the Council must decide if it has a duty to accommodate them

- Investigations take time and the Council often has to house the person whilst investigating

- B&B or emergency accommodation is the initial route to housing someone. This is costly, ranging from £50 to £130 per night

- Families will move out of B&B and into temporary accommodation whilst they wait for a permanent home to be found. Temporary accommodation is provided by registered providers or the council and has no direct cost to the Council

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The emergency housing route

Homeless – B&B or emergency

Temporary accommodation

Permanent accommodation

Costly to RBBC

Unstable for families

Housing providers

Limited supply

High demand

Low levels of allocations

Affordable housing

Taking a corporate approach to prevention

- Our current approach to homelessness is not financially sustainable for the council, households, providers and other agencies

- Homelessness is complex and we need to improve our ability to respond to the reasons and work with others to improve outcomes for our residents

- It is linked to unemployment, low paid employment, relationships, mental & physical health, debt, and a fast moving housing market

- We need to address the most common causes of homelessness which are: loss of a private tenancy, violence, friends or family unwilling to accommodate and relationship breakdown

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Moving forward

- More resources are needed to identify households at risk of homelessness earlier so we can take preventative action

- Unemployment is a significant factor and we need to improve access to employment, remove barriers, help people apply for work and create opportunities

- The supply of permanent and temporary accommodation is crucial and improved access to the private rented sector through better resourcing will reduce homelessness

- We are working to identify work streams, resources and plan for action across the council and with our partners.

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