

<b>Signed off by</b>	Head of Housing
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<b>To</b>	Executive
<b>Date</b>	Thursday, 24 March 2022
<b>Executive Member</b>	Portfolio Holder for Housing and Support

<b>Key Decision Required</b>	N
<b>Wards Affected</b>	(All Wards);

<b>Subject</b>	Homelessness & Rough Sleeping Strategy 2022-2027
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<b>Recommendations</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>(i) The Executive adopt the Homelessness Review and Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy and Action Plan 2022-2027.</li> <li>(ii) That the Executive authorise the Head of Housing in consultation with the Executive Member for Housing to make any necessary minor amendments to the Homelessness Review and Homelessness &amp; Rough Sleeping Strategy 2022-2027 prior to implementation.</li> </ul>
<b>Reasons for Recommendations</b>
<p>The Council is required to publish a Homelessness Review and Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy every five years. The current Strategy expires in March 2022. The new Strategy, set within a revised legislative framework, contains priority activities and actions to prevent homelessness, support those who are homeless and deliver more suitable accommodation options. It underpins the Council's homelessness service whilst adopting a partnership approach to improve outcomes for those in housing need.</p>
<b>Executive Summary</b>
<p>The current Homelessness Strategy expires in March 2022, therefore a new Homelessness Review and Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy have been developed. The impacts</p>

of Homelessness Reduction Act 2017 (HRA), which was implemented in April 2018, have shaped the priorities and workstreams in the new document. The Housing Service is working with new client groups, undertaking more intensive casework, and responding to many more clients with support needs. Working in partnership with statutory agencies, housing providers, support services, charities and others is crucial to delivering services and suitable accommodation options and is reflected in our approach.

This new Strategy, consulted upon in October 2021, reflects the on-going and the new challenges involved in tackling homelessness. It has a strong focus on homelessness prevention, assisting the increasing numbers of applicants with support needs, tackling rough sleeping and securing more accommodation options. The Housing Service continues to be supported by Council revenue funding, annual homelessness government grant funding and short-term government homelessness grants for specific projects.

**Executive has authority to approve the above recommendations**

### **Statutory Powers**

1. The Homelessness Act 2002 requires local housing authorities to take strategic responsibility for tackling and preventing homelessness.
2. The Council is required by the Homelessness Act 2002 to publish a Homelessness Strategy and Housing Review every five years, the current Strategy expires in March 2022.

### **Background**

3. This strategy has been drafted in the context of national legislation, guidance and priorities to respond to local housing pressures, homelessness trends, housing need, partnership work and resources.
4. New homelessness legislation in the form of the HRA, has widened the Council's homelessness responsibilities and duties. At the same time, it also placed more responsibility on applicants to cooperate and help themselves.
5. This Strategy marks a continuation of partnership working to deliver good housing outcomes, applying for and securing external funding and capitalising on opportunities to deliver more accommodation options for local people.

### **Key Information**

#### **Homelessness Review**

6. The Homelessness Review examines homelessness and need in the borough during the previous 3-5 years. Homelessness data is provided from April 2018, which is the point from which legal duties changed significantly, up to April 2021 the end of the financial year. Given the significant changes in legal duties introduced by the HRA, it is not meaningful to compare data with previous years. A relatively small data set is

available, and homelessness activity is also set within the context of the impacts of the Pandemic.

7. During 2018-2021, 1,530 initial assessments of homeless households were completed, around a further 1,500 contacts were also made to the team for advice / signposting. Of the assessments, a prevention duty was accepted to over 1,000 applicants and a relief duty accepted to just under 500 households.
8. More households have support needs. Since 2018, over 3,200 support needs were identified by applicants with two thirds reporting multiple needs. The most common single need is mental ill-health, followed by physical ill-health or disability, and thirdly risk of or having experienced domestic abuse.
9. Since 2018, the number of single people owed a prevention or relief duty now accounts for 50 percent of cases. Prior to the HRA the dominant group owed a homelessness duty was families with children. This change in the client type reflects the wider statutory duties imposed by the HRA and the increasing numbers of people with support needs. More intensive case management and support is needed, and the lack of suitable accommodation is a challenge.
10. The most common cause of homelessness has changed with the main cause family / friend eviction rather than end of a private rented tenancy. During 2018 – 2021, 241 main duty decisions were taken and of these a duty was accepted for 188 households.
11. Until the pandemic numbers on the Register were consistently around 800 households. Numbers have risen. At the end of November 2021, 1,196 households were on the Register.

### **Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy Objectives**

12. The Strategy objectives are outlined below, build upon our existing good practice, the use of prevention tools embedded in the Housing Team's work and responds to more specific issues around support needs and rough sleeping.

#### **Objective one: Prevent homelessness and sustain tenancies**

13. Preventing homelessness at the earliest opportunity underpins our approach and this will continue to produce positive outcomes for households despite challenges around securing affordable housing options. Our areas of activity are supporting those at risk at the earliest opportunity; directing households to money advice services; preventing the loss of a private tenancy; accessing private rented accommodation and tenancy sustainment.

#### **Objective two: Respond to support needs**

14. We provide advice, support and make multiple referrals to support agencies and accommodation providers for clients with support needs. There is a good supply of low support housing, but not enough medium to high support housing. Working in partnership is crucial to providing effective support and accommodation options. Our priority areas are mental health; prison leavers and ex-offenders; alcohol and substance misuse; young people and care leavers and domestic abuse.

#### **Objective three: Tackle Rough Sleeping**

15. Whilst the number of street homeless people is low, the numbers of clients at risk of rough sleeping due to insecure accommodation arrangements remains an issue. Analysis of the support needs reported, shows this group when combined with people

with a history of repeat homelessness form the second largest support need group. Our priority areas of activity are a complex need supported housing scheme, East Surrey Outreach Service (eSOS); tenancy support; and move on schemes.

#### **Objective four: Improve access to and the range of accommodation options**

16. Securing the delivery of additional housing options is an on-going long-term challenge supported by the Council's planning policy, the Corporate Plan and Housing Delivery Strategy. We also rely on existing housing to meet housing need and our homelessness duties. Our priority areas of activity are: Housing Register and choice based lettings; delivering new affordable homes, council led schemes and funding our partners to deliver housing.

#### **Action plan**

17. The Strategy action plan is focused on new activities and areas of work to support and enhance the good practices we have currently employ and continue to review.

#### **Options**

1. Option 1 – Approve the recommendations in this report. This is the recommended option. This Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy will be approved for adoption and activity on new actions to help prevent and manage homelessness will commence.
2. Option 2 – Defer approval of the recommendations to enable further work on the Strategy to be undertaken. This is not recommended. This draft strategy has been prepared to respond to local housing need and in consultation, furthermore the current strategy period ends in March 2022.

#### **Legal Implications**

3. The review and strategy have been produced in accordance with the Homelessness Act 2002 and Homeless Reduction Act 2017 and accompanying guidance.

#### **Financial Implications**

18. Funding for the homelessness service over recent years has comprised sums allocated in the Council's annual Revenue Budget and Capital Programme plus a range of time limited and one-off sources of funding. Much of the time limited funding has either been paid via a government grant or the been secured through a bidding programme.
19. The Housing Service revenue budget for 2021/22 is £1.000 million and the approved Capital budget is £0.850 million funded from Section 106 developer contributions.
20. In recent years additional revenue funding has been secured from government in the form of grants or successful bids to funding programmes. A total allocation of £0.812 million was received in 2020/21 and a further £1.100 million in 2021/22. The grant funding comprises the annual Homelessness Prevention grant, Next Steps accommodation funding for rough sleepers, Rough Sleeper Initiative Funding, Cold Weather funding as well as other sources. Funding is allocated for specific uses or projects, for example the annual Homelessness Prevention Grant totalling £1.138 million over two years funds 5 x full time housing staff to manage the additional responsibilities brought in by the HRA, 2 x fraud officers, 2 x Money Support staff, East Surrey Outreach Service, rent in advance, deposits and loans and YMCA NextStep.

21. The team has secured capital grant from Homes England of £0.190 million towards the Council led project to deliver four bungalows in Horley as well as revenue grant funding towards support services. The Housing Service worked in partnership to secure £0.150 million capital funding through the Rough Sleeper Accommodation Programme in 2020/21 towards the purchase of two flats for rough sleepers which will be delivered by Transform Housing.
22. The Service has good success at securing grant funding following bids to various government homelessness prevention schemes and will continue to apply as appropriate. Local authorities are notified about programmes at short notice this presents a challenge in terms of forward planning.
23. Many future actions and activities will be funded within current budgets. Additional capital funding will be required to deliver additional accommodation in the form of supported housing for single people and temporary and emergency accommodation for homeless households. The aim is to reduce expenditure on private nightly paid accommodation and provide a local emergency response to homeless households. These projects will be presented as they are developed.

#### **Equalities Implications**

24. An Equalities Impact Assessment (EIA) of the strategy has been completed and is attached at Annex 4. The EIA has identified that several groups will be impacted positively, including people who are vulnerable through age; people with a disability or long-term health impairment; those who are pregnant and people experiencing deprivation. No negative impacts have been identified.

#### **Communication Implications**

25. There are no specific communication implications from approval and publication of the strategy and review.

#### **Risk Management Considerations**

26. The Housing Service and delivery of the strategy are funded by the annual housing budget. This is further supported by annual funding and short-term grant funding from the Department for Levelling up Housing and Communities. A risk to the strategy and to service delivery would be a cessation of the annual Homelessness Prevention grant during the next five years. The loss of short-term grant availability would limit opportunities to undertake activities beyond the scope of statutory activities such as outreach work, however the normal activities of the housing service are not dependent on short-term grants.

#### **Consultation**

27. The draft Homelessness & Rough Sleeping Strategy was available on the Council's website for comment from 14<sup>th</sup> September to 14<sup>th</sup> October accompanied by a survey seeking views on the Council's homelessness service and activities. A social media campaign throughout this period encouraged participation alongside staff email signatures promoting participation to clients and professionals.

28. On 6<sup>th</sup> October an on-line stakeholder consultation event took place. A range of organisations were invited to attend from the social housing sector, health, Surrey County Council, domestic abuse specialists, support providers, Probation, and advice agencies. Invitees were also encouraged to complete the on-line survey. The 20 individuals attending were extremely positive about our work and approach. The trend of rising numbers of single people with support needs was recognised along with the gap in supply of suitable supported accommodation for this group.
29. The need for and commitment to partnership and joint working was endorsed by professionals. The consultation event triggered options for further discussion around supported housing provision, which will be explored further.
30. An all Member workshop also took place on 6<sup>th</sup> October and was attended by 13 Members, generating questions, comments and interest in single homeless people, accommodation options, the winter night shelter, securing the right affordable housing through planning and queries about private renting. Members expressed their support and interest in the variety of activities undertaken by the team to help households facing homelessness.
31. At close of the on-line survey, 37 completed surveys had been submitted from a mix of clients, professionals, front line workers and others. The relatively small number of responses limits generalisations. However, these points emerged:
  - Most participants found it easy to contact the team, some opportunities for changes to further strengthen communication were suggested
  - The public have a slightly lower awareness of the advice and information on the Council's website than professionals, although both groups had found it helped to some extent resolve their housing issue, improvements to add and tailor content to meet different needs and abilities was highlighted
  - Overall respondents rated the housing team positively in its effectiveness in resolving issues, feedback on staff at a personal level was positive from all respondents
  - Respondents were largely satisfied with the support provided by the housing team in assisting clients with specific support needs such as mental ill health
  - Mental ill health was most frequently mentioned by client respondents as a support need
  - Overall participants reported there was not enough suitable accommodation for people with support needs, mental ill health, substance misuse and rough sleepers
  - Professionals largely felt joint working arrangements were effective
  - Professionals and clients expressed frustration at the lack of housing availability in the borough.
32. The survey highlighted areas in which the housing team can make small changes to improve the customer experience, it also highlighted the need to review our website content and raise awareness of it. These improvements and changes will be made within day to day service delivery.

33. The issues flagged around support needs, gaps in suitable supported housing and lack of affordable housing more generally, endorse the priorities set out in the Homelessness Strategy.
34. On 9<sup>th</sup> December 2021, Overview and Scrutiny Committee received a report, a copy of the draft Homelessness Review and Homelessness Strategy, Action Plan and Equality Impact Assessment. The main discussion by the Committee considered the numbers of households in emergency accommodation, the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on homelessness, additional emergency accommodation, working with partners, quality of housing and empty office blocks. Terminology around priorities and objectives has been updated in response to points made by the Committee. The Committee endorsed the activities and actions to tackle homelessness set out in the Homelessness Review, Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy, Action Plan and Equality Impact Assessment and emphasised in particular the need for further accommodation in the borough with a wider mix of quality homes and purchase of property where possible.

### **Policy Framework**

35. The Corporate Plan 2025 sets a housing objective to secure the delivery of homes that can be afforded by local people and choice of tenure, type and size. A series of actions explain how this will be achieved. Actions include working with partner organisations to deliver homes for local people, providing local temporary and emergency housing whilst continuing to secure private rented and social housing to prevent homelessness, working with Raven to identify estate renewal opportunities, prioritising local people for affordable housing, and using or planning policies to secure affordable housing. The Strategy will make a significant contribution towards meeting these Corporate objectives.

### **Background Powers**

1. Corporate Plan 2025 - [https://www.reigate-banstead.gov.uk/info/20205/plans\\_and\\_policies/280/reigate\\_and\\_banstead\\_2025](https://www.reigate-banstead.gov.uk/info/20205/plans_and_policies/280/reigate_and_banstead_2025)

### **Annexes**

Annex 1: Homelessness Review

Annex 2: Homelessness & Rough Sleeping Strategy 2022-27

Annex 3: Homelessness & Rough Sleeping Strategy Action Plan 2022-27

Annex 4: Equality Impact Assessment