

People

Portfolio Updates

January 2024



Reigate & Banstead
BOROUGH COUNCIL
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Housing & Support update

Portfolio Update



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Housing Services

- Homelessness
- Housing Options
- Housing Register
- Refugee & Asylum Seeker accommodation
- Housing Delivery – including Delivery Strategy update (included in agenda)

Homeless statistics 2023/24 (estimated Q4)

	<u>21/22</u>	<u>22/23</u>	<u>23/24</u>
• Homeless Approaches:	1137	1385	1817
• Owed a 'Prevention duty':	268	291	312
• Owed a 'Relief duty':	189	235	287
• Positive Outcomes:	297	329	353
• Main Duty Acceptances:	55	59	83
• Average number in B&B:	34	39	56
• Affordability approaches:	587	626	743

- **Approaches** = Contacts from households requiring advice or assistance: You will note an increase of over 400 (31% increase over previous year), this is not a surprise due to the increasing challenges around finding & securing affordable accommodation and some households struggling to maintain their accommodation during a difficult cost of living situation that the country is experiencing. We are also seeing a significant increase this year on approaches from those leaving Home Office accommodation.
- **Prevention duty** = Households threatened with homelessness within 56 days and required case working. This figure has risen due to the significantly higher number of approaches.
- **Relief duty** = Households that are actually homeless, (many will have unsuccessfully been through the 'Prevention' period). This figure is increasing more than the Prevention duty figure as it is becoming harder to prevent homelessness, so more cases are moving to the Relief stage of their homeless application (become homeless). Many Home Office approaches go straight to Relief as there is not enough notice for Prevention and with little or no spoken English in most cases or tenant history in the UK, it takes time to secure accommodation options.
- **Positive outcomes** = Households that avoided Main Duty homelessness through case work, were either able to remain in their original accommodation or were assisted into alternative accommodation. Against the odds, the team have managed a higher number of positive outcomes this year which helpfully supports, to an extent, the increased number of applications. This year more grants have been utilised to provide

higher levels of rent in advance, deposits and for the first-time landlord incentive payments to secure private rentals as well as funds to pay rent tops ups in some cases to bridge the gap between the Local Housing Allowance benefit level and the monthly rent charged. In some cases, arrears have also been funded to avoid evictions.

- **Main Duty acceptance** = Unable to prevent or relieve homelessness by the end of 56-day prevention and relief periods, so RBBC had a duty to secure permanent accommodation. Continues to increase over recent years, expect this trend to increase as higher number of households present as homeless and it becomes harder to source and secure affordable housing options.
- **Average number in B&B:** Continues to increase, this is to be expected as cases become more complex, and it remains harder to secure move on accommodation for applicants (both temporary and permanent). Expect this trend to continue.
- **Affordability approaches:** The number of homeless approaches that advise that they have affordability issues.

Housing Register - (23/24 estimated Q4)

	<u>21/22</u>	<u>22/23</u>	<u>23/24</u>
• Nominations to social tenancies:	196	300	239
• No. of households on list at 31/12:	1153	1213	1284
• 18 new build rented properties nominated to in first 3 quarters (87 this time last year)			
• 1022 applications received (963 this time last year)			
• 425 applications accepted (401 this time last year)			
• 796 applications rejected (688 this time last year)			
• Approximate waiting times: 1 bed – 3 years, 2&3 bed - 3.5 to 4 years plus			

- The number of vacant social / affordable rented properties available to nominate to significantly reduced against the 300 plus that we had access to pre Covid.
- The number of households on the Housing Register is slowly increasing.
- The most concerning figure is the low number of new builds, this is not a surprise, and we are hearing across the South East that RP's are not delivering new builds as they are concentrating on their current stock standards and focussing more on becoming net zero carbon. There is also very little in the pipeline via s106 sites.
- Note the high volume of applications staff assess, the high number of applications rejected (mainly due to not fitting the criteria or not completing the application process in full). Other applicants are removed from the list when they fail to respond to yearly renewal contacts.

Challenges *(no particular order)*

- Continued shortage of rented homes that are affordable (social and private sectors)
- Negative impact of the Renters Reform Bill protracted discussions
- Shortage of local nightly paid B&B accommodation
- Growing homeless cohort due to Home Office asylum beds in borough

Highlights

- Staff preventing homelessness for over 350 households
- RBBC investment of over £6m for TA & EA purchases
- Increase in Housing team head count
- The commitment of the Housing team
- Good amount of grant funding

Challenges:

Continued joint working with Registered Providers and planning colleagues to secure as much affordable housing as possible on new sites. Registered Providers have also reduced or paused new developments whilst they concentrate on improving the quality of their current stock, as well as preparing for the new Regulator of Social Housing consumer standards.

Homeless families are backing up in emergency & temporary accommodation due to the shortage of affordable homes. The Council's purchasing programme provides some assistance but the number of homeless households out number vacant affordable homes. The Council's social tenancy downsizer project started in November 2023 and is showing early signs of success with moving tenants that are under occupying family homes and making them available for homeless families.

Renters Reform Bill on route through Parliament – Proposals include, ending section 21 'no fault' evictions, creating a register of landlords, introducing a private rented ombudsman to help enforce renters' rights, making it illegal for landlords and agents to refuse to rent properties to people who receive benefits and give local authorities more power to enforce and protect renters' rights.

The Home Office procured over 700 bed spaces for Asylum Seekers in the Borough until they pulled out of two hotels in December. The Home Office now procure just over 500 bedspaces. Each Asylum Seeker that is given a positive decision and awarded Refugee

status can approach the Council for homeless assistance. For over the last three months homelessness from Home Office accommodation has become the third highest reason for homelessness (prevention & relief cases), behind loss of an assured shorthold tenancy and eviction by friends / family. Applications from Refugees are time consuming and often more costly, as most require an interpreter for every contact and none have any tenancy history in the UK.

Some of these challenges are being addressed through projects shared on next slide.

Grant Funding this year to support our work:

- £294,031 RSI (Rough Sleeper Initiative) This is to be paid over 3 year (2022-25) and is for the salary of a prison resettlement worker managed by eSOS for RBBC, funds for emergency accommodation and personal budgets.
- £636,036 East Surrey RSI , again paid over 3 years 2022/25. Joint bid by the 4 LA's, this will fund some emergency accommodation, 3x eSOS outreach posts and some personal budgets
- £79,200 Accommodation for Offenders , paid over 2 years 2023-25 to secure private rented accommodation for up to 24 homeless offenders
- Standard yearly grant: £686,515 Homeless Prevention Grant announced for 2022/23 (used for salaries of 8x Hsg Staff, 1x Fraud Officers, 2x Money Support Officers, ESOS, emergency accommodation spend and other homeless prevention work
- £287,000 Homeless Prevention Grant top up.
- £359,250 Asylum Dispersal Grant

Projects

1. Oct 22 - £4m from Housing Reserves to purchase and refurb 7 family TA units and a multi bed emergency accommodation property for singles
2. March 23 - £1.2m from Housing Delivery Reserves to purchase 4x family TA units and assist two RP's purchase another 8 family homes between them
3. September 23 - £1m from Housing Reserves to purchase and refurb 4 family TA units

All above scheme also attract Homes England or DLUHC grant funding as well as direct funding from the RP's

- Social Housing Downsizers 12 month pilot project
- Bring forward RBBC owned development sites

1. 4x family units purchased to date
2. 4x family units purchased by RBBC. 1x purchased by Mount Green and 1x purchased by Raven to date
3. 1x family unit purchased and 3x under offer

Social Downsizer pilot went live in November – already freed up a 3 bed family social housing property for a homeless household

Asylum Seekers – Home Office accommodation

- Four Points Hotel, Horley: Initial Accommodation for up to 238 males
- Cambridge Hotel, Horley: Initial Accommodation for up to 123 males
- Quadrant House, Redhill: Overflow Dispersal Accommodation for up to 160 women and children
- Largest impact on local services sits with Health colleagues including maternity / new mother services and GP services.
- The number of homeless approaches from those living in Home Office accommodation and receiving Refugee status and therefore access to public funds is significantly increasing. Last financial year we had 19 approaches over 12 months, to the 31 December this financial year we have received 70 approaches, it is expected to be over 100 approaches by 31 March 2024.

- Initial Accommodation (Hotels) is Home Office accommodation, for Asylum Seekers when they first arrive in the UK until they receive their Home Office decision.
- Overflow Dispersal Accommodation (QH) is Home Office accommodation, for Asylum Seekers that the HO have moved from Initial Accommodation whilst still waiting for their HO decision.
- All those that receive Refugee status whilst living in HO accommodation in the RBBC area have a Local Connection with RBBC under homeless legislation so can approach for assistance.
- RBBC have provided over £30k in grants to 9x local agencies that were already working with Asylum Seekers to provide them with support and activities.

Benefits

Overview & Scrutiny
January 2024

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Housing Benefit & Local Council Tax Support

- These are statutory functions administered on behalf of the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) and the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities
- In 2023/24 we are forecasting that we will pay Housing Benefit of £25.5m in Housing Benefit and around £7.5m in Local Council Tax Support
- We have around 5,000 households claiming Housing Benefit, and just over 5,000 households receiving Local Council tax Support
- Discretionary Housing Payments are paid to residents who need additional help with their rent, and to prevent homelessness – 2023/24 fund is £183K, funded by the DWP
- The service also supports other initiatives on behalf of the government – in 2023/24 this included the Energy Bill Support Scheme payments

Housing Benefit & Local Council Tax Support

In the previous 4 quarters, the volumes processed have been –

New Claims

Housing Benefit	618
Local Council Tax Support	2,606

Changes of Circumstances

Housing Benefit	17,812
Local Council Tax Support	23,877

Discretionary Housing Payments

In 2022/23 we dealt with 397 applications, 40% of which were successful and received an award

Universal Credit

- Universal Credit roll out – migration of existing claims from “legacy benefits, including Housing Benefit for working-age claimants
- Households moved to Universal Credit by constituency (October 2023) –

Reigate	73%
East Surrey	76%
Epsom & Ewell	73%
- Local Authorities will for the foreseeable future continue to deal with Housing Benefit claims for households of pensionable age, supported housing and temporary accommodation
- Costs for supported housing have been increasing due to changes in policy for housing people with support needs, and an increased number of organisations providing supported housing, which is not always fully subsidised by DWP funding

Supported Housing

- Costs for supported housing have been increasing due to changes in policy for housing people with support needs within the community
- We have seen an increased number of housing providers and organisations providing supported housing, which is not always fully subsidised by DWP funding
- Housing Benefit expenditure on supported accommodation is forecast to be £1.1m in 2023/24. Under the current regulations, we will subsidise this by £439K, due to not being able to claim the full subsidy back from the DWP (compared to £131K in 2018/19)
- Detailed reviews are taking place of all Housing Benefit claims for supported housing

Intervention update:

Family Support Programme, Refugee
Resettlement, Money Support Team

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Intervention: Family Support Programme

- We have received 208 referrals this year – a large increase in comparison to last year (131)
 - Wait times have increased to 8 weeks
- Family complexity continues to increase, with workers needing to spend more time supporting families.
 - The average length of intervention is now 18-20 weeks
- Families note the most change through working with the service in their wellbeing, boundaries and behaviours and meeting emotional needs
- 97% of families note a positive change in their wellbeing through working with the Family Support Programme

Work on behalf of 3 councils

Intervention: Money Support Team

- Referrals have increased from the previous year
 - 2023 – 182 referrals
 - 2022 – 237 referrals
 - 2021 – 209 referrals
- Length of intervention remains on average 8-10 weeks
- Impact of cost of living crisis, in work/fuel poverty and supporting with claiming additional benefits (specifically those with disabilities) are the biggest three impacting referral numbers this year.
- Clients note the most change in their income & benefits and their wellbeing

Intervention: Refugee Resettlement

Supporting

- 6 households within the Syrian scheme
- Supporting 6 Afghan households
 - Including 3 which arrived this year

Since the start of the war in Ukraine:

- 380 Ukrainian guests have arrived in the borough, with every ward in welcoming Ukrainians into their community
- 51 families (124 guests) have been supported to move into Private Rented Accommodation
- 23 families (47 guests) have returned to Ukraine
- We have supported 32 families (48 guests) to move to live with a new sponsor

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Leisure update

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Leisure: GLL

- Positive operational delivery for GLL across all three centres.
 - Full management contract fees re introduced including inflationary rise as per contract
- Continued customer confidence in the sector
 - Membership numbers have risen across all three centres in 2023
 - Tadworth up 1.95% across the Year
 - Donyngs up 1.8%
 - Horley up 2.32%
 - 1,097,031 individual uses in 2023
- Partnership of New Club Scheme
 - 4 new start up clubs starting in all three centres funded by the use of free hours arranged by RBBC and GLL.

Leisure: Leisure Development

- School holiday Activities
 - Mixture of free and paid for activities
 - 117 sessions run in 2023 (46% increase on 2022) and 1747 bookings (31% increase on 2022).
 - We introduced activities specifically for children with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND)
 - We introduced activities for under 5's, in addition to activities for 5-15 year olds.
- Surrey Youth Games
 - 74 children trained for 8 weeks across 6 different sports, an increase of 32% from 2022
 - 6 different sports represented at the Games; Go TRI, inclusive dance, street basketball, swimming and tennis.
 - 36 children represented RBBC at the Youth Games, an increase of 17% from 2022
- Star for a Night
 - 8 Weeks free tuition in Acting, Singing and Dancing
 - One show at the Harlequin Theatre
 - 42 participants in the show, a decrease in 9% from 2022

What are we trying to achieve?

Raise awareness of affordable and accessible activities and facilities in the borough.

Give residents the confidence to take part on their own and have fun in their community.

Improve physical and mental wellbeing and develop lifelong activity habits.

Year	Attendance	Activities
2019	643	38
2021	472*	20

*including Play rangers attendance of 237

Leisure: Arts Development

Introduction of a creative wellbeing programme – in partnership with local health colleagues - which provides a network of high-quality arts and creative sessions to improve both physical and mental health outcomes for residents. Projects include:

- Art for wellbeing at Merstham Hub
- Photography for mindfulness from the Harlequin, Redhill
- Creative Writing at Horley Library
- Monthly creative drop in, last Friday of the month

Although numbers are small we are engaging with the right people, those with health conditions who are greatly benefiting from the programme.

Arts Takeover week, during October, was introduced to allow residents to engage in cultural activities:

- 23 arts activities/sessions delivered, including crochet, ukulele, photography, singing, art, dance, African drumming and poetry.
- 162 participants



Slide 21

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Leisure: Harlequin Theatre

- Strong start to the year, until the closure of the venue due to the discovery of RAAC
 - April – September strong calendar of events with a busy programme. Busiest offering ever.
 - Established Café offering with regulars each week.
 - Discovery of RAAC forced the closure of the venue in September
- Return of Outdoor Theatre this Summer
 - 16 live unique events
- Pantomime was moved to a Big Top and was extremely successful and reputationally beneficial
 - delivered in a Big Top Tent in Memorial Park, Redhill
 - Only Big Top panto in England
 - 43 shows welcome over 15 000 customers
 - Use of Harlequin Pop up in the Belfry for live theatre Santa's North Pole Adventure
- Completed the refit of all downstairs toilets
- External to the Harlequin we supported with The Sport Awards, Remembrance Sunday, Volunteer Awards, Lighting up the Hall, Run Reigate and Pride in Surrey.