

Review of progress on the Council's Homelessness Strategy

Summary

To consider progress on the Council's Homelessness Strategy, consider current position in relation to this area of work and endorse the work programme proposed for the Housing Service over the next 12 months.

Portfolio: Regulatory

Date Portfolio Holder signed off report 9th June 2016

Wards Affected All

Recommendation

The Executive is advised to resolve

- (i) Progress on the Action Plan in the Homelessness Strategy be noted; and.
- (ii) The Homelessness Strategy be updated to include the actions proposed in this report.

1. Resource Implications

- 1.1 The Council has legal duties to provide accommodation for certain homeless households and this incurs a cost, even after a charge is passed onto the household assisted.
- 1.2 The Council has received a grant from the Department of Communities and Local Government (DCLG) over a number of years specifically for use in activities to prevent homelessness. The use of this grant has demonstrated that investing in services and activities that prevent homelessness offers both a better outcome for individual residents and families while also providing a saving to the Council.
- 1.3 In 2015/16 two Surrey authorities each had in excess of 100 households in bed and breakfast, with a third getting as high as 68 households. This had led to reported expenditure of over £1 million in one authority on bed and breakfast. Net cost in Surrey Heath has remained under £60,000 in each of the last two years.
- 1.4 All actions in the Strategy can be delivered within the Housing Services Budget or with the use of DCLG grant.

2. Key Issues

- 2.1 There is an increase in homelessness both nationally and regionally demonstrated by an increase in homeless applications to local authorities, an increase in rough sleeping and an increased use of bed

and breakfast (including the unprecedented use by some Surrey authorities).

- 2.2 There has been a shift in the main reason for homelessness from young families being excluded by their parents to people losing a home in the private rented sector, and at the same time there has been an increasing focus on using the private rented sector to source settled homes to prevent homelessness.
- 2.3 Welfare reform has had an impact on families in the Borough and the further reform due to be implemented will continue to impact on residents' ability to access and maintain accommodation.
- 2.4 Locally there has been limited delivery of affordable rented homes which places a reliance on re-lets in the existing social housing stock to meet the housing need of residents.
- 2.5 During the life of the Homelessness Strategy the Council will have to monitor and seek to mitigate not just continuing welfare reform but also other new policies such as the extended right to buy, cuts in support services due to Surrey County Council budget settlement and housing association rents decreasing and possibly for there to be no new affordable rented homes built as policies supporting homeownership are prioritised.
- 2.6 The Government has introduced a 'Gold Standard' for homelessness services setting out 10 Local Challenges aimed at supporting local authorities to improve their frontline housing services and increase opportunities for early intervention and the prevention of homelessness. The Council is working towards that standard.

3. Options

- 3.1 The Executive can accept, amend or add to the actions detailed in Annex A.

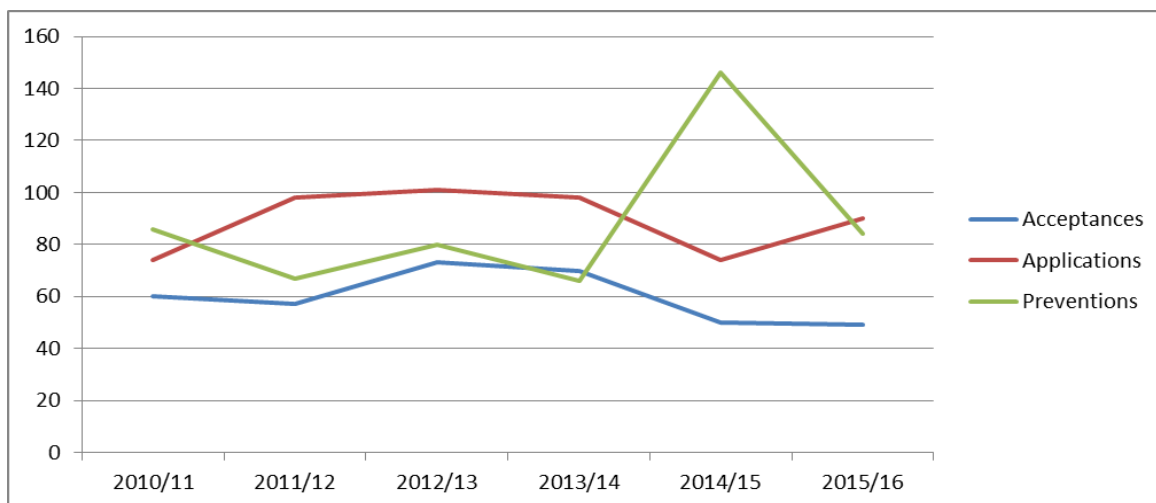
4. Proposals

- 4.1 To recognise the progress made to date in the Homelessness Strategy 2015-18; and
- 4.2 agree that the actions identified in the review of the Strategy be added to the Action Plan.

5. Supporting Information

- 5.1 In spite of upward trends in statutory homelessness nationally and regionally the Council has maintained homeless duties accepted at a steady level mainly due to continued success in preventing homelessness as demonstrated in Figure 1.

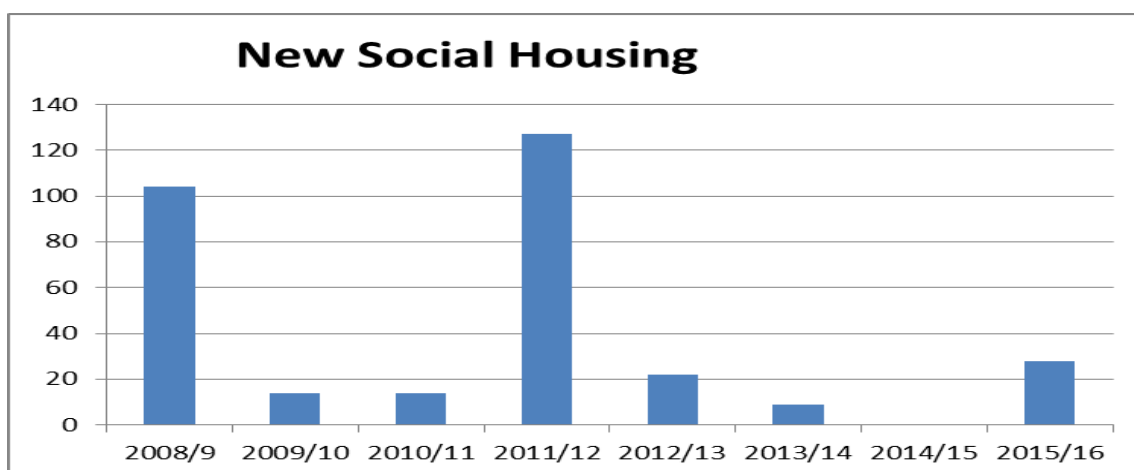
Figure 1



5.2 While there has been this success with statutory homeless households at the same time rough sleeping has increased in the Borough with the annual estimate required by DCLG confirming 18 rough sleepers on 11th November 2015, compared with 4 the previous year, 0 in 2013 and 2 in 2012. Further work is underway to identify the individuals and their needs.

5.3 There has been no significant social housing delivery for three years, with no new affordable homes delivered in 2014/15 and just 5 rented and 15 shared ownership homes in 2015/16 (delivery detailed in figure 2). Social rented homes are needed to meet housing need in a planned way to prevent homelessness and also to re-house those households who become unavoidably homeless.

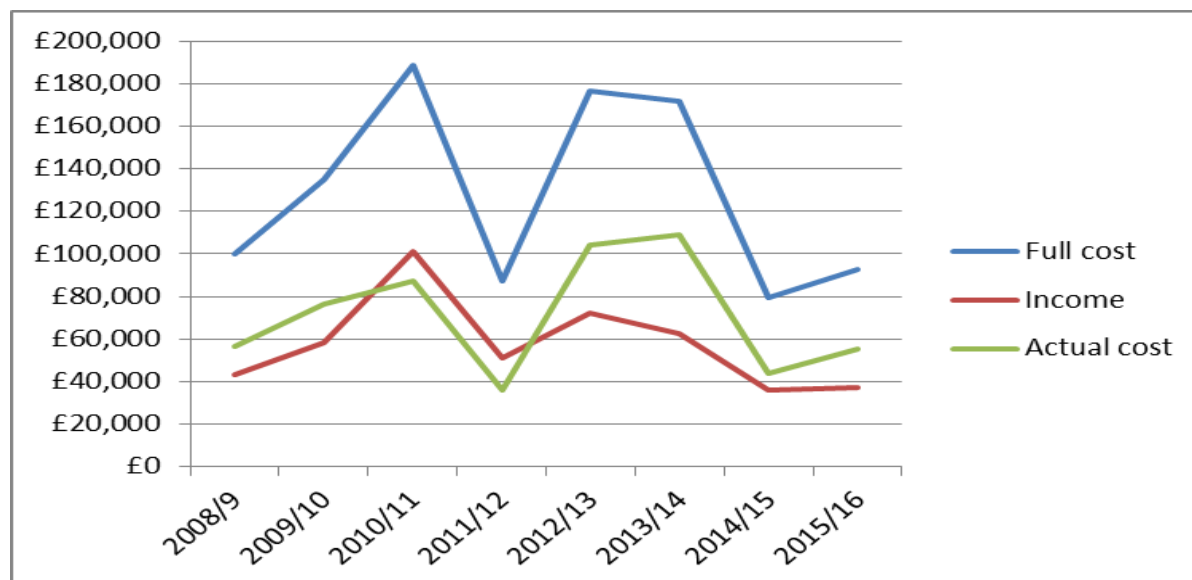
Figure 2



5.4 During the last year the Housing Service has had a number of successes in delivering the aims of the Strategy including:

5.4.1 A focus on homeless prevention and a low level of bed and breakfast use, resulting in savings to the Council as well as better outcomes for residents using the service. The cost of bed and breakfast (gross and net is detailed in Figure 3);

Figure 3



5.4.2 A programme of pre-tenancy training for young families in temporary accommodation was devised covering housing options, money management, tenancy management, basic home maintenance and cooking on a budget. The sessions were delivered in partnership with Accent Group, Frontline Debt Advice, and the Welcome Project;

5.4.3 Joint training on Universal Credit for Council Officers, housing providers and the voluntary sector was delivered in November by a specialist trainer;

5.4.4 A successful bid was made for DCLG grant funding to work with single homeless households and a Team Around the Person Co-ordinator employed with this funding to work across Surrey Heath and Runnymede. The project recognises that homeless people have multiple needs and uses the Family Support model to bring together a team of relevant professionals to address their needs in a co-ordinated way;

5.4.5 The Housing Options Service has undergone and passed a Diagnostic Peer Review as part of the Gold Standard process. This involved officers from partner authorities spending three days on-site and one day offsite looking at both the strategic and policy approach the Council has to dealing with homelessness and at the experience and outcomes housing customers have. The Peer Review scored the Council against a number of factors, with the highest score being achieved for the quality of officers' interaction with residents. The review highlighted

both good practice and areas the Council can seek to improve on. The successful score achieved confirms that a good all round homelessness service is being delivered and this allows the Council to start submitting evidence to achieve the Gold Standard; and,

- 5.4.6 With DCLG grant the Council jointly funded a specialist Money Advice service at Surrey Heath CAB with Accent Group in for a 5th year in 2015/16.
- 5.5 In delivering this work some actions in the Strategy have not been completed, including:
 - 5.5.1 Promoting landlord accreditation as a way of improving standards in the private rented sector, especially amongst accidental and non-professional landlords;
 - 5.5.2 Developing a Harassment and Illegal Eviction Policy;
 - 5.5.3 Reviewing the web content on housing options to allow residents to be able to help themselves in meeting their housing needs, including an 'options wizard' to give advice targeted to residents individual circumstances;
 - 5.5.4 Setting up 'pathway' arrangements with partner agencies to ensure that people with special needs or a need for specialist housing have clear options in moving towards independence or meeting their housing needs.
- 5.6 These actions have been reviewed and are still relevant so will be included in the coming years work plan.
- 5.7 In reviewing current challenges the following work has also been identified:
 - 5.7.1 Further changes to welfare will impact on residents housing, notably the roll out of Universal Credit that will effect residents across tenures and will also require supporting private landlords understand the changes, and the benefit cap which will especially impact larger families in private rented housing as well as some in housing association homes. The Surrey Heath Welfare Reform Partnership will be reconvened bringing together social landlords, Job Centre Plus, Surrey Heath and Heathlands CABx and officers from Housing Services and the Benefits Team to ensure a co-ordinated approach;
 - 5.7.2 The increase in rough sleeping requires a new approach and a multiagency and multi-sector meeting was held early in March to establish the best approach locally and to develop a jointly owned and locally driven action plan. A local group has been established to look at delivering day services for homeless people in Surrey Heath;
 - 5.7.3 The contradictory nature of the private rented sector in it being both the greatest source of homelessness as well as the main way of housing

households at risk of homelessness requires new work to engage with landlords to settle and maintain people in suitable homes in the sector; and,

- 5.7.4 A commitment is required to carry out the relevant work and submit the evidence to meet the Gold Standard.

6. Corporate Objectives And Key Priorities

- 6.1 Tackling homelessness and the causes of homelessness is an important part of *protecting the general health and wellbeing of the community through our services*, part of Objective 3 of the Corporate Plan: *We will build and encourage communities where people can live happily and healthily.*

7. Policy Framework

- 7.1 The Council is required by the Homelessness Act 2002 to review homelessness and the availability of housing and services available for people at risk on homelessness in its district and to produce a strategy to address the issues identified.
- 7.2 The Council's current Homelessness Strategy runs to 2018 although best practice and guidance advise that it should be regularly reviewed.

8. Legal Issues

- 8.1 The Council has met its duty in publishing a Homelessness Strategy.

9. Risk Management

- 9.1 Should there be a big increase in statutory homelessness this will lead to additional spending on bed and breakfast accommodation. The Strategy seeks to mitigate this through preventative work although a lack of new affordable rented homes in the pipeline the ability to move people on who become homeless could lead to a silting up of temporary accommodation and increased B&B use.
- 9.2 While there is no statutory duty to provide everyone who is homeless with a home, an increase in rough sleeping could impact on other services (health, Police, etc.), potentially lead to ASB issues if it includes street drinking and begging and could lead to reputational damage to the Council if the need is not seen to be being addressed.

10. Equalities Impact

- 10.1 An Equalities Impact Assessment was completed at the time the current Strategy was published.

Annexes	Annex A: Proposed actions for the Homelessness Strategy
Background Papers	<u>Homelessness Strategy</u>
Author/Contact Details	Clive Jinman – Housing and Homelessness Manager
Head Of Service	Jenny Rickard – Executive Head of Regulatory

Consultations, Implications and Issues Addressed

Resources	Required	Consulted
Revenue	✓	
Capital		
Human Resources		
Asset Management		
IT		
Other Issues	Required	Consulted
Corporate Objectives & Key Priorities	✓	
Policy Framework		
Legal		
Governance		
Sustainability		
Risk Management		
Equalities Impact Assessment		
Community Safety		
Human Rights		
Consultation		
P R & Marketing		

Annex A

Priority area	Action	Outcomes	Lead	Comments / review
Welfare Reform	<p>Reconvene the Surrey Heath Welfare Reform Partnership to co-ordinate work on the roll out of Universal Credit and other reforms in the pipeline.</p> <p>Partnership will include SHBC, housing providers, CABx and Job Centre Plus with other organisations bought in as needed.</p>	<p>Residents receive targeted advice and support through changes to mitigate any negative outcomes (e.g. accruing arrears) and support positive choices (e.g. better money management, and moving into work or training).</p> <p>Work will minimise duplication across agencies and ensure a consistent message to residents.</p>	Housing Services Manager	Previous success of the Partnership included visits to all residents affected by the first benefit cap to give tailored advice.
Rough Sleeping	To analyse data from for the 2015 rough sleepers count	To understand who is sleeping rough in Surrey Heath, the reasons, and possible options for addressing individual need.	Housing Options Team Leader	
	To hold an event for statutory and voluntary sector partners	To identify needs and possible options for rough sleepers in the Borough, including the resources agencies are able to commit to the issue.	Housing Services Manager	It is hoped that this work can be led by others with the Council's support after the initial event

		Establishment of a multi-agency Forum or Group that will develop and deliver a local action plan around this issue		
	To consider future funding for the Team Around the Person Project	External funding identified to continue the Team Around the Person Project	Housing Services Manager Runnymede BC	
	Support the delivery of day services for homeless households	Support third sector partners in identifying a suitable service for residents who are homeless or threatened with homelessness to minimise rough sleeping in the Borough	Housing Services Manager	
Maximising housing options in the Private Rented Sector	Introduce a more formalised approach to working with local landlords	Increased access to private sector homes through a better understanding of why landlords work with the Council and developing a 'menu' of support options for landlords that meet their business needs.	Lettings Negotiator	
Meeting the Gold Standard	Submit evidence to meet the bronze standard by September 2016, and Silver by 2017.	External verification of standards within the Council's housing Service as well as access to continuous improvement tools.	Housing Services Manager	