

Surrey Heath Borough Council
Performance & Finance Scrutiny Committee
6 March 2024

Inclusion & Housing Portfolio Update

Portfolio Holder:	Councillor Lisa Finan-Cooke, Inclusion & Housing
Strategic Director/Head of Service	Nick Steevens & Sally Kipping
Report Author:	Various

Summary and purpose

To review the Inclusion & Housing Portfolio services progress over the past 12 months which covers the following areas:

- Corporate Safeguarding
- Disabled Facility Grants
- Emergency Accommodation
- Equalities & Diversity
- Family Support
- Grants
- Housing & Homelessness
- Refugee Assistance
- Private Sector Housing
- Voluntary Sector & Community Partnerships

1. Corporate Safeguarding

- 1.1 The Council last updated its Safeguarding Policy and Practice in February 2023 and was approved by Executive in June 2023. The policy is subject to an annual review which is currently being conducted. All areas within the Council now have safeguarding champions available to support when needed.
- 1.2 Safeguarding Adults & Children training and Domestic Abuse training is required for all staff with additional training tailored towards staff who deal face to face with clients commissioned and delivered designed specifically for Surrey Heath staff. Further training on Action Counters Terrorism (ACT) and See, Check & Notify (SCaN) is being completed by all new members of staff within Surrey Heath.
- 1.3 We continue to represent the Council at the officer and elected member Children's' and Adult Safeguarding Surrey meetings which ensures we are aware of any changing responsibilities or procedures, including a requirement for a central register of

safeguarding issues to be held by the Council. This requirement will be delivered as part of a move to streamline our safeguarding reporting mechanisms through the use of e-forms.

2. Disabled Facilities Grants

2.1 The Home Solutions Team also provides the Council's Home Improvement Agency and delivers the Council's mandatory and discretionary grants programme, including Disabled Facilities Grant (DFG), which are capital grants that are available to people of all ages and in all housing tenures (i.e. whether renting privately, from a social landlord, or owner-occupiers) to contribute to the cost of adapting a property for the needs of a disabled person.

2.2 DFGs are means tested and the maximum grant award available is up to £30,000. The works undertaken support independence, keeping people in their own home which is adapted to meet their needs, reducing care and health costs and, especially in the case of older frail residents, delaying or preventing transfers to care. Used preventively it can reduce hospital admissions, e.g. by removing trip and falls hazards, and used reactively it can be used to facilitate hospital discharge to a safe home environment. Works specifically meet Better Care Fund outcomes:

- BCF 1 - Aid to daily living/ effectiveness of re-ablement; and,
- BCF 4 Prevent Emergency Admissions.

2.3 A DFG can be used towards home adaptations such as the installation of:

- stair-lifts
- level access showers and wet rooms
- wash and dry toilets
- ramps
- wider doors
- bespoke home extensions to existing dwellings
- garden access

DFG funding also supports the delivery of the Handy Person service and pays for the materials costs of the Community Equipment Service, delivering non-building works aids to residents (e.g. hoists and non-permanent ramping).

2.4 In Surrey Heath the DFG programme is delivered through the Council's in-house Home Improvement Agency. This allows additional case work with older and disabled residents to take a more holistic approach, supporting them with such things as income maximisation and accessing other services. Whilst the DFG is a mandatory grant set out in legislation, the Council is allowed to spend DFG funding more flexibly if there is a policy in place. This Home Assistance Policy sets out how the flexibility will be used, and includes fast track funding for stairlifts and a top up of up to support the delivery of major adaptations.

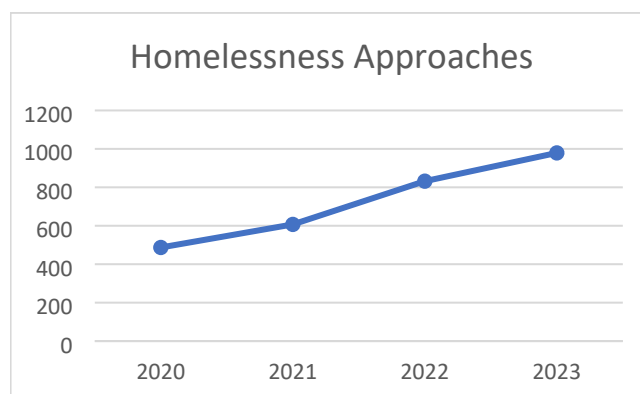
2.5 DFG funding is allocated by the Department of Levelling Up, Housing and Communities. The level of funding is determined by housing authority however, once calculated is paid into the local Better Care Fund un-ringfenced. In Surrey this funding is then passported in full to the Borough and Districts. Surrey Heath's allocation for 2023/24 was £884,021 with an additional £77,139 awarded in-year. In 2021/22 and

2022/23 there was an underspend following the slowing down of works during the pandemic. This underspend was carried forward into 2023/24, providing an additional £166,863 and giving a total budget of £1,128,023.

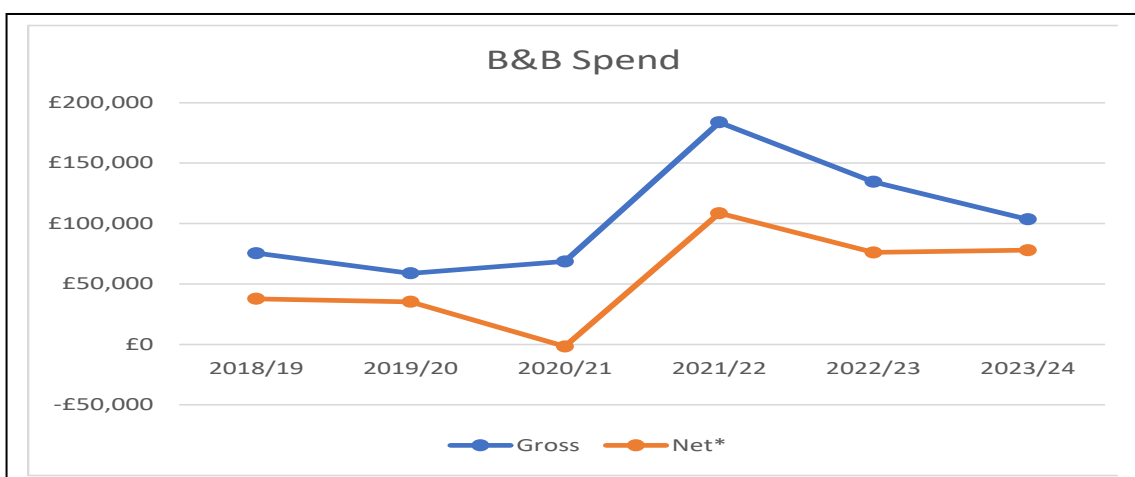
- 2.6 In the current financial year, for the first time in 5 years the service is set to spend its full allocation of grant. This is due in part to completing works for more residents however there have also been inflationary increases in the cost of materials and labour. Figures from the OBR show build cost inflation peaked at 14% at the beginning of 2023 and, while dropping since, are predicted to remain at above 4% for 2024. The 2024/25 allocation is not due to be announced until May 2024. Initial indication is to expect funding at a similar level.
- 2.7 The service has a target of delivering 80 DFGs a year which is a figure based on past performance. In 2022/23 102 DFGs were completed and as at 31st December 2023, 104 works had been completed in the first three quarters of 2023/24. There is currently no national or County benchmarking however Surrey County Council collect data across the Borough and Districts and there is a Surrey-wide DFG group. A request for comparative data and regular monitoring has been made to establish how the service performs compared to other, similar authorities.
- 2.8 As part of the aspiration for continual improvement, the Council has undertaken a review of the Home Improvement Agency and has identified a number of work areas to improve strategic understanding, ensure best value and involve residents in the design of services. An action plan has been developed and will be shared with partners, with plans to hold a forum for clients, advocacy groups and professionals in 2024.

3 Homelessness & Emergency Accommodation

- 3.1 The number The Housing Solutions Team deals with housing advice and homelessness in the Borough and seeks to deliver solutions for those who are risk of or are homeless. Between 1st January 2023 and 31st December 2023, the Housing Solutions Team received 979 approaches from households whose housing situation was likely to lead to homelessness without intervention or who were already homeless at the time they sought help. This is an increase of 147 over the previous year. The chart below indicates the year on year increase in homelessness approaches:



- 3.2 From these approaches 172 households were either threatened with homelessness (i.e. would be homeless in the next 56 days) or actually homeless at the time they approached the Council therefore triggering a homelessness duty under the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017. When a household is *threatened* with homelessness the Council has a duty to assess their needs and produce a Personal Housing Plan, setting out the action the household and the Council will take to *prevent* them becoming homeless.
- 3.3 When a household is *actually homeless* the Council has a duty to assess their needs and produce a Personal Housing Plan, setting out the action the household and the Council will take to *relieve* their homelessness. If someone has a priority need, i.e. they have children or are vulnerable in some way, there is a duty to provide temporary accommodation during this relief period. There is not a duty to provide accommodation to households who do not have a priority need.
- 3.4 The Council's main temporary accommodation option is with Accent at two sites: Darwin Court (12 self-contained units) and Lawrence Lodge (32 units with shared facilities). When this accommodation is not available the Council uses nightly paid accommodation, mostly bed and breakfast establishments set up to cater for local authority placements but when these are full then normal hotels are used.
- 3.5 Households placed in Bed and Breakfast are responsible for a charge for the accommodation. This is made up of an occupation charge, which for those on benefits or a low income is covered by Housing Benefit, and a service charge that all households are responsible for paying covering services such as heating and lighting. These charges are taken from DWP figures setting out what people on benefit should contribute to the cost of their accommodation. The cost to the Council is greater than the cost passed on to households placed. The chart below shows B&B spend over the last 6 years (2023/4 is three quarters). The gross spend is the invoiced cost of B&B, the net figure is the cost after collecting a service charge both through Housing Benefit and directly from placed households.



- 3.6 Surrey Heath's B&B use has to date remained low. As at 31st January 2024 there are 3 households in B&B. A snapshot of other Surrey authorities show a mixed picture from those who provided details:

Authority	No. in B&B
Tandridge	0
Surrey Heath	3
Runnymede	9
Guildford	14
Mole Valley	14
Elmbridge	39
Reigate and Banstead	60
Spelthorne	121

- 3.7 Whilst positive, there are challenges to this low arising from the loss of Lawrence Lodge and a shrinking private rented sector. The redevelopment of Lawrence Lodge represents a 73% reduction in the temporary accommodation in the Borough. Work is underway with a consultant and Accent to identify both current and future needs, and costed options for meeting this need and will report in April 2024. The availability of housing for homelessness households in the private rented sector has dropped substantially as landlords are leaving the market in response to tax changes, increased regulation and the potential impact of the Renters Reform Bill. Despite financial support from Rent Choice, the Council's scheme providing advance rent and deposit bonds the reduction in private rented accommodation is driving up rents which are increasingly unaffordable for low income households.

Homelessness Prevention Grant

- 3.8 The Council receives Homelessness Prevention Grant (HPG) to support delivery of services. Grant is used for staffing costs, project work and individual interventions to support households. Examples in 2023 include:
- Staffing: funding the Homelessness Prevention Case Officer
 - Projects: consultancy to map temporary accommodation requirements and options;
 - Individual interventions: supporting residents with rent arrears to remain in their current accommodation or as rent in advance or a cash deposit to secure alternative housing (this use of grant has replaced the Council's previous loan scheme saving £20,000 p.a).
- 3.9 In 2023/4 the Council received £342,000 HPG and a similar sum is expected in 2024/25. The Government has now consulted on a new formula which is likely to see the allocation reduce to £166,428 in future years under current plans. One aspect of the formula is the cost of temporary accommodation and compared with other areas this is comparatively low. The formula will look at spend over the last three years so if costs increase future grant levels should also increase.
- 3.10 Due to the pressure on Community grants, HPG has also been used to support the Hope Hub, providing a core funding grant of £40,000 in 2023/24.

Rough Sleeping

- 3.11 The number of single homeless residents continues to be high with the most visible cases being those who are rough sleeping, which is a small but persistent number of this client group. The Council is required to do an annual count or estimate of the number of rough sleepers out on a given night in November. The figure for 2022 was 9 rough sleepers this reduced to 8 in 2023. The table below shows the rough sleeping count over the last 8 years. The 8 rough sleepers recorded were all known to services before the estimate and continue to be able to access advice and assistance.

Annual Rough sleeper count figures:

Year	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023
Count	18	12	5	6	12	7	5	9	8

- 3.12 In response to the demand from single homeless residents the Council has made three consecutive successful bids to the Government's Rough Sleeping Initiative (RSI) to provide accommodation and support services to this client group. The funding of £200,000 has provided:

- Joint funding with Surrey Heath CCG for a mental health worker based at the Hope Hub.
- Revenue funding to support setting up the Emergency Accommodation Service with the Hope Hub for rough sleepers.
- Funding for joint work with Accent and Transform to set up a Housing Led scheme; and,
- Funding to employ a Single Homelessness Floating Support Worker within the Housing Support Team.

- 3.13 The Council used developer contributions to buy Connaught Court from Accent, a 10-bed unit to provide accommodation and support for up to two years for single homeless individuals and to purchase a 6-bed property for the Hope Hub's Emergency Accommodation Service (EAS). Connaught Court now operates at full capacity while the EAS often carries vacancies. These vacancies are in part due to the rent levels at the EAS and the Hope Hub are looking at how other similar services work to see if this barrier to access can be addressed.

- 3.14 Homeless Link, a national homelessness charity, was commissioned to review services for rough sleepers and single homeless residents in Surrey Heath to ensure that services are working effectively together and identifying gaps in provision. This work, funded by DLUHC, reported at the end of 2023 and will feed into the Council's refreshed Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy later in the year.

Floating Housing Support

- 3.15 The Council delivers a Surrey County Council contract with funding of £53,000 pa to deliver Floating Housing Support. This service is integrated into the Housing Solution Team and is an important tool in homelessness prevention. In 2023 there were 83 referrals for families and individuals needing help to maintain their independence in the

community with the help of floating support. This is a 23% increase from 2022, and 2022 saw a 52% increase in referrals from 2021. Most referrals come from the Housing Solutions Team and is for families that are either being supported to try and prevent their homelessness or are moving from temporary accommodation into a settled home and need some support to set up their tenancy and make community links e.g. register with GP and access other health services.

3.16 Support includes:

- Managing money/budgeting skills
- Claiming benefits
- Developing domestic and/or social skills
- Being safe at home
- Moving and settling into a new home, setting up services, accessing furniture and white goods
- Helping users to sustain their tenancy
- Finding employment or voluntary work
- Accessing services such as doctors, dentists etc.
- Accessing community services

4. Equalities & Diversity

4.1 The Achieving Equity Strategy was refreshed in January 2024 and has now been published on our website see: [Achieving Equity Strategy](#) This ambitious strategy aims to remove barriers and improve opportunities to residents when accessing services and Council communications. We are now undertaking a baseline assessment and will be delivering an action plan to deliver our equality objectives, working with the Engaging Communities Working Group and the Achieving Equity Forum to ensure that we are focussing our effort on actions that make the most difference to our communities.

5. Family Support & Refugee Assistance

5.1 There is currently a Service Level Agreement in place between Surrey Heath Borough Council and Surrey County Council (SCC) to deliver the Family Support Programme across Surrey Heath and Runnymede until March 2025. SCC currently funds the full costs of delivery of the Family Support Programme.

5.2 The Family Support Programme continue to deliver a high-quality service to the most vulnerable families in Surrey Heath and Runnymede. The Surrey Heath and Runnymede team consists of a Team Manager, 2 Team Leaders, 1 qualified social worker, 5 Family Support Coordinators and 1 administrator. Family Support Coordinators hold a maximum caseload of 12 families, with Team Leaders holding a half caseload of 6 families. Between April 2023 and January 2024 we successfully supported 406 children and their parents/carers across Surrey Heath and Runnymede. This is a significant increase from 2022/23, where the service supported 259 children

and their parents/carers across Surrey Heath and Runnymede. The service has consistently met and exceeded all Key Performance Indicators within the SCC Service Level Agreement.

KPI	Q1 target	Q1 actual	Q2 target	Q2 actual	Q3 target	Q3 actual
Families to be contacted within 5 working days of allocation	70%	100%	70%	100%	70%	100%
Families to be seen withing 10 working days of allocation	70%	90%	70%	87%	70%	92%
Early Help assessments to be completed within 45 calendar days of allocation	70%	82%	70%	97%	70%	94%

- 5.3 The service uses the 'Outcome Star' impact tool to measure family progress. The outcome star takes a holistic measurement of family life at the beginning of intervention, and then again at the end to review progress made by each family. The star is broken down into 10 different areas and each area is scored between 0-10, with 10 being the highest.
- 5.4 Data from supported families shows that 75% of parents report an improvement in their own emotional wellbeing during intervention, with 61% of parents reporting an improvement in their children's emotional wellbeing and children's behaviour.
- 5.5 The Family Support Programme team have recently been approached by Surrey County Council, requesting the service's support with families from within the Woking area, due to significant staffing issues in the Woking service. Woking FSP is going through a service delivery transfer process from Woking Borough Council, to Surrey County Council who will lead on the final contract year, resulting in difficulty recruiting staff. Supporting families in the Woking catchment has been reluctantly agreed to due to concerns of placing additional pressure on the team and caseloads which may impact on our local families. Currently, the Surrey Heath and Runnymede team are providing support to 3 families from the Woking area.
- 5.6 Each year, the family support programme works closely with a local community gym in Surrey Heath to create Christmas Hampers for families open to the service. This year, the gym collaborated with the service to create 50 Christmas Hampers. Donations for the hampers came from gym members, Surrey Heath residents and a Christmas Fair fundraising event, hosted by the gym which raised over £5000. This money allowed for the hampers to be created, which consisted of dried goods for 'Christmas in a box' such as mince pies, crackers etc and a £90 Tesco voucher each to enable families to purchase additional fresh goods for Christmas Day. These were distributed to all families who would benefit, including those on the FSP waiting list. The collaboration between the service and the gym allows hampers that are organised by other providers to stretch further amongst families who are not open to the Family Support Programme.
- 5.7 The Family Support Programme is currently funded by the 'Supporting Families Framework' central Government grant which is claimed by Surrey County Council and

used to deliver the service through districts and boroughs. This funding is due to end in March 2025 and there have been no further announcements as to whether this will continue. In January 2024, Surrey County Council announced the launch of a new service named the 'Intensive Family Support Service' (IFSS) which appears to directly mirror the role of the Family Support Programme (FSP) and has increased speculation and anxiety amongst staff that the FSP will cease to be delivered by the districts and boroughs by the end of March 2025.

United Kingdom Resettlement Scheme

- 5.8 The Family Support Team runs the UKRS (UK Resettlement Scheme) previously known as the vulnerable persons resettlement scheme and more recently, the ARAP/ACRS (Afghan Relocation Assistance Policy/Afghan Citizens Resettlement Scheme) on behalf of Surrey Heath and Runnymede Borough Councils.
- 5.9 The UKRS was central government's initial response to vulnerable families fleeing Syria following the outbreak of the civil war in 2011. In 2019, the scheme merged with other UK refugee schemes and now reaffirms the UK's ongoing commitment to refugee resettlement, providing safe and legal routes to vulnerable refugees in need of protection. Government makes funding available to allow local authorities and healthcare providers to support refugees for the duration of the scheme (up to 5 years).
- 5.10 The UKRS began in Surrey Heath in 2017 as there was difficulty in identifying affordable properties in the private sector which impacted on the Councils commitment to house 10 families by 2020. The borough has received 5 UKRS families in total, with 2 having completed 5 years of support and now fully integrated into community life. The UKRS families will have all closed to the service by March 2025. This service is fully funded by Central Government funding.
- 5.11 Outcome stars are completed with all UKRS families in order to measure progress during their time with the service. The table shows that 100% of families have reported that they have made progress in 'friends and community', and 80% have reported that they have seen an improvement in 'my children's health'.

Afghan Relocation Assistance Policy

- 5.12 In August 2021, we received 5 families under the Afghan Relocation Assistance Policy (ARAP). The ARAP is for Afghan citizens who worked for or with the UK government in Afghanistan in exposed or meaningful roles, of whom are assessed to be at high or imminent risk of threat to life, following the Taliban uprising. Central Government funding is available to local authorities to support refugees for the duration of the scheme (up to 3 years).
- 5.13 Due to the urgency in resettling these families, they were placed in temporary accommodation on arrival, while the team worked to secure long-term accommodation for the families. All 5 of the families had moved into permanent accommodation by May 2022.
- 5.14 By September 2024, all the Afghan families who originally arrived in the borough will close to the service, following completion of support. 7 further ARAP/ACRS families will be received into the LAHF 1 properties that SHBC have committed to delivering in the borough, which will provide the service with a further stream of funding for the next 3 years.

Homes for Ukraine Scheme

- 5.15 The Homes for Ukraine Scheme was introduced in March 2022, following criticism that the original family scheme did not offer wide enough refuge for those fleeing the war in Ukraine. The Homes for Ukraine Scheme requires a Ukrainian resident to identify a UK resident with whom are able to provide them with accommodation for at least 6 months. Residents match themselves independently, through friends or work colleagues and increasing social media presence. Sponsors are provided with a monthly 'thank you' payment to cover any costs incurred with hosting guests.
- 5.16 Those entering the UK under the H4U Scheme automatically become eligible for Local authority support for a 12-month period. After this period, sponsors will continue to receive monthly 'thank you' payments for a further 12 months, administrated by SHBC. In Surrey Heath, we have received a total of 171 individuals to the borough. Of these, 72 individuals (45 households) continue to reside in the borough under the H4U scheme. Each individual comes with an attached funding stream of £10,500 per person, which reduced to £5,900 for anyone arriving in the UK after 1st January 2023. This funding is apportioned between SCC and SHBC who are collaboratively delivering support to Ukrainian guests.
- 5.17 H4U guests are supported through our Resettlement Team, by our wider Resettlement Family Support Coordinators. In addition to the statutory work that the Homes for Ukraine team deliver, the service regularly arranges celebrations and social events for guests. Most recently, this included a Christmas party for all of the Homes for Ukraine guests and their sponsors. The Rotary Club kindly supported in donating funding for Christmas presents for the children and provided a surprise visit by Santa. The service continues to deliver a weekly social hub to guests, which is supported by volunteers that the team has recruited. The social hub provides an English conversational class to compliment formal ESOL lessons as well as an opportunity to meet other local guests.
- 5.18 The Housing Service has also been involved with the resettlement of Ukrainian households moving on from sponsors homes, both in planned or unplanned ways. Since 26th April 2022 the Team has provided advice and assistance to 45 Ukrainian families looking to move on from sponsors homes. 10 of these approaches have led to formal homelessness applications.
- 5.19 On the 19th February 2023 the Minister of State for Legal Migration and the Border and the Parliamentary Under Secretary of State Minister for Housing and Homelessness wrote to local authorities to outline the Ukraine Permission Extension (UPE) Scheme. The UPE scheme introduces a change to the Immigration Rules so that individuals who hold, or have been granted, permission to enter the UK from the Ukraine will be able to apply for further permission to remain. The new route will provide an additional 18 months permission, ensuring Ukrainians in the UK can continue to move into independent living, secure rental agreements and employment contracts, while also supporting the Ukrainian government's preference for the future repatriation of its citizens to help rebuild Ukraine when it is safe to do so.

Hong Kong (British Nationals Overseas)

- 5.20 In July 2023, a community support event was planned for the Hong Kong BNO's living in the Surrey Heath area after feedback from Cllr Ying Perrett to SHBC that Hong Kong BNO's were in need of support and advice. The event was advertised through

SHBC's social media channels as well as the social media and communication channels of the South East Strategic Partnership for Migration and Guildford Hong Kongers Group. The event was well supported by organisations and partners including Accent Housing, DWP, Surrey Community Action, SHBC Community Development and Social Prescribing.

Asylum Seekers

- 5.21 On 28th March 2022, A hotel within the Borough was taken up as Dispersal accommodation for Asylum Seekers who are currentted waiting for decision on their asylum requests to be made. Whilst Asylum seekers do not have recourse to public funds and are not eligible for LA support at a borough level, the borough were provided with a small, one off funding stream to act as a gatekeeper between the LA, accommodation provider and the local community.
- 5.22 A dedicated Resettlement Family Support Coordinator, currently carries out monthly site visits to the hotel and liaises with the providers to ensure the hotel residents are having their basic needs met and identifying if there is any community support which would be of benefit to guests. Recently, the coordinator identified a gap in guests being able to access public transport. The coordinator secured a £4500 grant from Frimley Fuel Allotments which has allowed the service to purchase bus passes for guests. These are monitored and managed by the hotel and guests request a pass as and when they need it from hotel staff which is reported to be working well.
- 5.23 Additionally, the coordinator has worked closely with the Rotary Club who have set up, and deliver a weekly craft group at the hotel for residents which are reportedly well attended. In February 2023, an Early Intervention and Triage officer joined the SHBC Housing team, who will take an active role at Lakeside, providing prevention work to asylum seekers around housing options, financial support and any relevant signposting support to external services.
- 5.24 There are currently 138 guests residing in the hotel. There has been media coverage around the Home Office closing hotel accommodation to asylum seekers as it is recognised that long term stays in hotels are detrimental to individuals. There are currently no plans or arrangements in place for Lakeside Hotel to close as dispersal accommodation to asylum seekers. The hotel is 'initial' accommodation, meaning that asylum seekers are placed there before being dispersed. In practice households are staying for months and, with the current Home Office focus on clearing the backlog of asylum claims, are receiving their decisions before being dispersed.
- 5.25 Once an asylum claim is accepted the household is given notice to leave the hotel and their status gives them access to homelessness services. Since July 2023 30 households have approached for advice. These are a mixture of single people and families from a number of countries. The same homelessness criteria apply so while there is a duty to provide accommodation for households with priority need (families with children and single people who are vulnerable) there is not a duty to provide housing for single, non-vulnerable households. To date 5 priority need households have been placed in temporary accommodation, and 6 single people have been referred to the Hope Hubs Emergency Accommodation Scheme (EAS).
- 5.26 While a number of agencies are assigned to work with the asylum seekers in the hotel and when they have to move out, the experience is that limited pre-work is being carried out with many households approaching the Council with an expectation of being given a 'Council' property. In order to better manage the advice households

receive, support people who receive status to make informed decisions about their options and provide move on in a planned way the Team are utilising Home Office grant to employ a Case Officer dealing just with this cohort. This role will provide a high quality first point of contact and triage service for people who are homeless or threatened with homelessness from Asylum Seeker accommodation.

Local Authority Housing Fund

5.27 In December 2022, the Department of Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (DLUHC) announced the £500 million Local Authority Housing Fund. In March 2023 Executive approved the Council's participation in the Local Authority Housing Fund (LAHF) with officers proceeding to acquire six affordable/low-cost properties and 1 bridging property to support those who may be homeless, at risk of homelessness or who live in unsuitable temporary accommodation and are eligible for support under the following resettlement schemes:

- Afghan Citizen Resettlement Scheme (ACRS) and Afghan Relocations and Assistance Policy (ARAP) (collectively referred to as the Afghan Schemes);
- Ukraine Family Scheme and the Homes for Ukraine and the Ukraine Extension Scheme (collectively referred to as Ukraine schemes)

5.28 In June 2023, round 2 of the Local Authority Housing Fund was launched which provided a £250 million fund (LAHF R2), with the majority of the additional funding used to house those on Afghan resettlement schemes currently in bridging accommodation and the rest used to ease wider homelessness pressures.

5.29 The service is working with Mount Green Housing Association and Stonewater to secure the purchase of LAHF 1 and 2 properties. Offers have been accepted on all 7 LAHF 1 properties. These consist of one 4 bed property, two 3 bed properties and four 2 bed properties. Of these, the 4-bed property and two 2 bed properties have now completed purchased and families have been identified and are moving in imminently. The further properties are due to complete before the end of the financial year.

5.30 The families currently matched to LAHF properties will be supported by the service under the Afghan Relocation schemes. This provides the service with ongoing funding to integrate families successfully into the borough across a 3-year period with £10,500 per person in year 1, £6000 per person in year 2 and £4020 per person in year 3.

6. Grants

6.1 A number of discretionary grant schemes have been administered by the Council including the Community Fund Grant, Ward Councillor Community Fund, Surrey Heath Lottery Grant and the Revenue Grant Scheme. In addition, several new funds have been developed in response to changing need and available funding and have been able to support both organisations and individuals in need across the borough: Emergency Food Fuel and Energy Grant, Arts Culture and Heritage Grant and the Join In Scheme (as highlighted in the Active Communities section). A review of the Council's grant funds was completed in February 2024 and the criteria of three key grants: Ward Councillor, Lottery and Community Fund were updated to bring them further in line with the Council's key priorities relating to 'Healthier and more inclusive communities'. The table below shows the level of Councillor expenditure by Ward up until the 6th February 2024.

WARD	AWARDED	BALANCE REMAINING
Bagshot	£2,000.00	£2,500.00
Bisley & West End	£1,952.00	£2,548.00
Frimley	£850.00	£2,150.00
Frimley Green	£2,399.33	£2,100.67
Heatherside	£1,000.00	£3,500.00
Lightwater	£0.00	£4,500.00
Mytchett & Deepcut	£1,385.00	£3,115.00
Old Dean	£2,259.00	£741.00
Parkside	£500.00	£2,500.00
St Michaels	£500.00	£2,500.00
St Pauls	£0.00	£3,000.00
Town	£2,000.00	£1,000.00
Watchetts	£1,500.00	£1,500.00
Windlesham & Chobham	£340.00	£4,160.00
TOTAL AWARDED	£16,685.33	£35,814.67
Applications pending	£2,500.00	

- 6.2 The Household Support Fund was administered in partnership with Citizens Advice Surrey Heath. The fourth allocation of funding saw Surrey Heath allocated £238,278 which was used to provide food and energy support to residents across the borough. In total, 6,000 households in Surrey Heath have been supported by the Fund since 2021.

7. Housing

Home Solutions Team

- 7.1 The Home Solutions Team deal with disrepair in residents' homes and manage standards in the private rented sector, including the licensing of Houses in Multiple Occupation (HMOs). The Home Solutions Manager, Tony Wakeford, is retiring in September 2024 after 30 years which will be a considerable loss of local knowledge, as well as the relationship built up with landlords in the Borough.
- 7.2 The Housing Health & Safety Rating System (HHSRS) identifies 29 known potential housing hazards that can be assessed. Hazards include damp and mould, excess cold, excess heat, crowding and space and risk of falls.
- 7.3 When a resident makes a complaint about their rented accommodation an inspection is completed to identify and rate the category of risk that any hazard poses. Where a Category 1 Hazard, the most serious harm outcome, is identified the Council has a duty to ensure that it is eliminated or at least reduced to an acceptable level. For Category 2 hazards, those less serious or urgent, the Council have a power to intervene with the degree of intervention being directly proportionate to the risk to health.
- 7.4 Where concerns about the quality of a property arise, the Council always seeks to find the quickest way to resolve issues for tenants and landlords. While every complaint could potentially lead to enforcement action, officers continue to have a strong track record of securing the best outcome without the ultimate sanction of carrying out works in default or prosecution but is a useful tool for managing landlords who are reluctant to fulfil their obligations. At the start of 2024 the Team have one case going to Court

for the operation of a HMO without a license and are building a case for prosecuting a landlord who has failed to respond to notices served.

- 7.5 During 2023 the Team responded to 139 housing complaints largely relating to repairs and disrepair issues. As a result of complaints, the Team undertook 101 housing inspections. This represents a 65% increase in housing complaints over the previous year. Whilst it is likely that this has been in part driven by an increase in damp and mould complaints as tenants knowledge of the issue has increased with publicity, current reporting through CRM and case management on Uniform makes analysis difficult.
- 7.6 The Home Solutions Team also works with landlords with homes that are in shared occupation. Some shared homes require a licence and since October 2018 those houses in multiple occupation (HMOs) that are let to five tenants or more with two or more households and share some facilities such as cooking and bathing are mandatory licensable. In order to comply with licensing conditions, landlords have to demonstrate that they have met the standards required for the operation of a HMO in terms of the facilities available, the condition of the property and management standards. Once they have provided a full application and paid their fee the property is inspected and, all being well, a licence granted. If further works are needed the landlord must comply with these before a licence is issued. It is an offence to operate a licensable HMO without a licence. The licence period last for five-years and is not transferrable.
- 7.7 Licensing ensures the health, safety and welfare of tenants in a rental sector that has historically had problems and helps to provide good quality housing for potentially some of the most vulnerable in the private rented sector. There are currently 77 licensed HMOs in the Borough and in 2023 the Council renewed 18 licenses after ensuring that they met the required standards. 2023 was the first year that no new HMO's were licensed.

Clearances/ Hoarders

- 7.8 Tackling hoarding requires a multi-agency approach. While the Council has enforcement powers under the provisions of the Public Health Act 1936 as amended by the Public Health Act 1961 to tackle properties that are in such a filthy or unwholesome condition as to be prejudicial to health, it is recognised that hoarding is often the result of a resident's poor mental health or other factors.
- 7.9 Work in this area is very time consuming, with a need to build trust and find solutions that work for the resident. It is a balancing act between the residents right to live the life they choose and the risk that their behaviour is posing both to themselves and sometimes to others around them.
- 7.10 The Council often provides the 'stick', giving notice to the owner or occupier requiring them to take such steps as may be specified to remedy the conditions or in the case of verminous premises to take such steps as may be necessary for destroying or removing the vermin. Ultimately the Council can take action to clear the property.
- 7.11 Occasionally we will be contacted by the NHS for a hospital release where the home environment is not considered conducive to the patient's wellbeing and in such cases there is a grant available to assist with such clearances. There have been no

clearances of housing due to hoarding in 2023 however the Team dealt with 14 complaints where a property was reported to be 'filthy and verminous' compared to 17 in the previous year. 6 of these were in Social Rented, 5 were in Private Rented and 3 were in Owner Occupied.

Public Health Funerals

7.12 Under Section 46 of the Public Health (Control of Disease) Act 1984 the Council has a duty to arrange the funeral of anyone dying within their jurisdiction intestate and without any next of kin. It involves:

- Registering the death
- Searching for next of kin.
- Searching premises for important documents and valuables.
- Arranging the funeral
- Attending the funeral where appropriate.
- Arranging payment and recovering costs.

7.13 Any expenses incurred can be reclaimed from the deceased estate and will become the first charge. Once funds have been recovered if there is any residue over £500 the estate is referred to the Treasury Solicitor as Bona Vacantia (Vacant Goods). Anything unclaimed will then revert to the state.

7.14 The Home Solutions Team did not provide any assisted funerals in 2023, a significant change from 9 public health funerals in 2022, but more in line with historic activity (3 in both 2021 and 2020).

The Housing Register & Allocation of Social Housing

7.15 The Council is required to have a way of allocating social housing. This requirement is met through the Housing Allocation Policy which sets out who is eligible to be considered for social housing and then how eligible applicants will be prioritised. The Allocation Policy is a mixture of legislation, regulations and local policy. It seeks both to meet individuals households housing needs and also make the best use of existing stock.

7.16 Qualifying applicants are placed into one of four priority 'bands'. These are:

- Band 1 contains a small number of applicants with an exceptional or critical housing need;
- Band 2 has applicants with a substantial housing need;
- Band 3 has applicants with a high housing need; and,
- Band 4 has applicants who have a housing need but whose priority is currently reduced, usually because of their actions or circumstances.

7.17 At 19th February 2023 there were 379 households on the Housing Register (plus 40 to be assessed) . 4 households were in Band 1, 126 households were in band 2, 132 households were in Band 3 and 117 households were in band 4. Households can only be considered for properties of a suitable size (e.g. a couple would not be considered for a three bedroom home). Of the 379 households, 186 were single people or couples requiring one bedroom, 106 were households requiring 2 bedrooms, 73 were households requiring 3 bedrooms and 14 were households requiring 4 bedrooms.

7.18 158 households were housed in 2023. The breakdown of these is: 67 households housed in 1 bedroom homes, 59 housed in 2 bedroom homes, 32 housed in three

bedroom homes and 0 housed in four bedroom homes.

Registered Social Landlords

- 7.19 There are 3605 social housing homes in the Borough. They are a mixture of flats, maisonettes, houses and bungalow and include 327 homes for independent living for older people (previously known as sheltered housing).
- 7.20 All private registered providers of social housing (housing associations) must have complaints and/or appeals procedures. These should be utilised as a way of compelling a landlord to meet their repairing obligations. If the failure by a social landlord to carry out a repair is due to poor administration or procedures, the tenant could complain to the Housing Ombudsman Service.
- 7.21 The Ombudsman might investigate the complaint and, if they find maladministration, will recommend how the landlord should resolve it. The Ombudsman may also inform the Regulator of Social Housing.
- 7.22 Before complaining to the Ombudsman, the tenant should exhaust any internal complaints procedure of the PRPSH. The Housing Ombudsman has published guidance for landlords on how to deal with disrepair claims. The guidance includes advice on the pre-action protocol for housing condition claims and the use of the alternative dispute resolution (ADR).
- 7.23 The Regulator of Social Housing is an independent body tasked by Parliament to focus on regulating the social housing sector at an organisational level, with two main objectives:
- Economic objective: to make sure that registered providers (landlords) are well-managed and financially stable
 - Consumer objective: to make sure that tenants get quality accommodation, have choice and protection, and can hold their landlords to account.
- 7.24 To achieve these objectives, there is a set of regulatory standards that contain specific expectations social housing landlords must comply with and the outcomes that they are expected to achieve. One of the standards landlords have to meet is the Home Standard. The Home Standard sets expectations for registered providers of social housing to provides tenants with quality accommodation and a cost-effective repairs and maintenance service. The Regulator of Social Housing's role is to set the consumer standards and to intervene where failure to meet the standards has caused, or could have caused, serious harm to tenants.

8. Voluntary Sector & Community Partnerships

- 8.1 Quarterly Networking events have been held for community and voluntary partners each quarter since July 2023. Hosted in partnership with Voluntary Support North Surrey, these events provide an opportunity to organisations providing vital support in the borough to meet, share information and build resilience across the sector. Themes have included: volunteer management, and funding.
- 8.2 The national picture on volunteering is challenging. NCVO (National Council for Voluntary organisations) stated at the launch of their 'The Road Ahead' report (a yearly analysis of the changing operating environment for the voluntary sector) that volunteering nationally has not returned to pre-pandemic levels. The cost of living

crisis will have impacted on potential volunteers as the pressure to seek paid work has increased and the time available therefore for volunteering has reduced.

- 8.3 A successful campaign to promote volunteering across the borough was also developed in partnership with Voluntary Support North Surrey and run from November 2023-January 2024 across social media, Heathscene and via Borough Boards in key community locations with early results showing an increased uptake in interest in volunteering.
- 8.4 The VSNS and SHBC campaign utilised social media, borough information boards and connections with third sector organisations in the borough to share a range of diverse images to promote volunteering. Although the results of the campaign may take time to trickle down, VSNS have compared volunteer registration via their website for the period December 2022-Feb 2023 against the period the campaign was running (December 23-Feb24) and found a 148% increase. Likewise comparing both time periods, an increase in volunteer referrals to organisations of 97% and an increase in successful placements of volunteers of 25% were noted during the campaign period. It is hoped that as VSNS continues to utilise the campaign materials in their work that these increases will continue to be reflected in local interest in volunteering.
- 8.5 Community engagement events focussing on the cost of living and health were held in September, October and January. Community partners including The Hope Hub, Citizens Advice Surrey Heath, Places Leisure, Social Prescribers and Libraries provided information on support options across the borough from budgeting to access to digital services and healthy eating.
- 8.6 The Armed Forces Covenant was approved by the Executive in September and an associated action plan will be brought to the Engaging Communities Working Group in February. A covenant signing event will take place before the end of the financial year 2023/24 and alongside this the Council will launch a new webpage dedicated to support and resources for ex and currently service Armed Forces members and their families.

Annexes

None

Background Papers

None