

Executive Report

Wards affected: All

Report of Director of Community Services

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Homelessness Strategy 2018-20

Executive Summary

This report sets out a revised Homelessness Strategy for the next two years in the light of the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017 (HRA17), which extended the duties on local housing authorities with effect from 3 April 2018. Following the presentation of the draft Homelessness Strategy at Overview and Scrutiny Committee on 5 June 2018, this report presents the proposed new Homelessness Strategy for approval by the Executive.

Recommendation to the Executive

- (1) That the new draft Homelessness Strategy 2018-20, as set out in Appendix 1 to this report be adopted.
- (2) That the Director of Community Services be authorised to implement the strategy and review and update the action plans in consultation with the Lead Councillor for Housing and Development Management.

Reason(s) for Recommendation:

To meet our duty under the Homelessness Act 2002 to review homelessness in the borough at least every five years and produce a strategy setting out our approach to the prevention of homelessness, provision of accommodation and support for those facing homelessness.

1. Purpose of Report

- 1.1 The Homelessness Act 2002 requires us to carry out a review of homelessness and produce a prevention strategy at least every five years. This report seeks Executive approval of a proposed strategy for the Council for the period 2018-20 (attached as Appendix 1).

2. Strategic Priorities

- 2.1 The new Homelessness Strategy will contribute to our fundamental theme and priorities as follows:

Our Society – believing that every person matters and concentrating on the needs of the less advantaged.

3. Background

- 3.1 We have a duty under the Homelessness Act 2002 to carry out a review of homelessness in our area at least every five years and produce a strategy to prevent homelessness. Our most recent strategy covered the period 2013-2018 and provided the framework and direction for the delivery of our homelessness services over this period. The strategy is now at the end of its life and with the introduction of the HRA17 we need to consider our future strategy in the light of the changes and current housing pressures in the borough and the factors that will influence this in future years.
- 3.2 Given significant changes introduced by the HRA17, the ongoing shortage of affordable housing and continuing pressure of welfare reform, we expect homelessness and the risk of homelessness to increase. We propose that we have a shorter strategy period than previously and seek to align a future review with that of the overarching Housing Strategy, which runs from 2015-2020. We consider that this will allow time to understand better the impact of the new legislation, the roll out of Universal Credit in October 2018, the implications of leaving the European Union on the wider economy and the future funding of supported housing will be known. In addition, we should have an agreed Local Plan which will facilitate an increase in the delivery of affordable housing.
- 3.3 With uncertainty about the future, we will need to review and update our strategy action plans so they reflect any changes that take place. We propose to do this annually.

Proposed new homelessness strategy for 2018-20

- 3.4 Our priorities must be relevant under the new legislation and reflect the new and wider responsibilities of the Council as well as the Government's policies and wider reform agenda for tackling homelessness and proposals to halve rough sleeping by 2020 and ending it completely by 2027.
- 3.5 We have focused the new strategy and action plans on three areas:
- **Prevention** – Effective and creative use of resources to prevent homelessness
 - **Support** – Provision of a range of support services to help people access and sustain accommodation
 - **Supply** – Ensuring there is an adequate supply of accommodation for people who are homeless or at risk of homelessness.

Prevention

- 3.6 The prevention of homelessness is the central objective of our Homelessness Strategy.
- 3.7 The HRA17 was implemented on 3 April 2018. The Act required us to review and change the way we work and we have received additional Government funding which provides us with the resources and flexibility to adapt as we establish the longer-term implications. The new legislation presents significant challenges as it places greater emphasis on preventing homelessness in an area where access to suitable and affordable housing is so difficult for lower income households.
- 3.8 We commission a range of services and our partner agencies and joint working arrangements play a key role in preventing homelessness. With affordable housing in short supply, effective communication and the development of new initiatives to engage with our customers at the earliest opportunity will become increasingly important.
- 3.9 To strengthen our homelessness prevention work our strategy and action plans highlight the importance of:
- developing our service delivery of the Homelessness Reduction Act in line with evolving good practice
 - working internally and with our partners to identify early intervention opportunities
 - reviewing procurement and commissioning arrangements.

Support

- 3.10 In October 2018, Universal Credit will be rolled out in Guildford and this will affect all those receiving benefits as well as others on low incomes, tenants in social and private rented housing and those in socially excluded groups.
- 3.11 Rough sleeping and single homelessness remain our most challenging areas of work. Single people are not normally a priority for housing but are increasingly at risk of homelessness and have limited options. We have seen an increase in the number of rough sleepers with multiple needs, particularly mental health issues, who experience difficulties engaging with services and accessing appropriate support and accommodation.
- 3.12 We currently commission a range of services to prevent homelessness and enable access to housing and support. Our services need to adapt and transform to remain effective and reflect the changing environment and we need to consider that funding constraints may lead other commissioning bodies into decisions that have consequences for us.
- 3.13 The strategy acknowledges these challenges and proposes that we:
- Continue to prepare for the introduction of Universal Credit and support our customers and partners.

- Review rough sleeping services and our approach to commissioning to ensure resources are targeted to reflect the needs of our customers in a changing environment
- Work with our partners to develop joint working arrangements, maximise resources and explore joint commissioning opportunities.

Supply

- 3.14 The future is uncertain in respect of the housing market and the availability of affordable housing. Without an adequate supply of housing that is affordable for people on benefits or on low incomes the demand for social rented housing, which is limited in supply, will increase.
- 3.15 Our use of the private rented sector has been essential to our success in preventing homelessness to date. Landlords are facing a number of changes in relation to legislation, regulation and taxation which makes the buy to let market less financially attractive and increases the administrative burden. This could affect the sector and reduce supply as new investors are discouraged from entering the market or existing landlords prompted to leave.
- 3.16 The HRA17 has extended our obligations and we now have a duty to relieve homelessness where the person is likely to become homeless within 56 days. We lease a number of properties to housing associations and other providers to help us meet housing need. Existing arrangements have been effective but the new legislation has changed our requirements and we now need to review our use of resources to ensure they are targeted effectively. In particular, we need to increase our supply of short-term accommodation for single people and families.
- 3.17 To ensure the supply of housing the strategy sets out our intention to:
- Maximise the use of social housing including addressing under-occupation and tackling social housing fraud
 - Review our use of the Private Rented Sector, improve our offer and incentives to ensure we sustain and increase the number of Landlords and agents willing to work with us.
 - Review the use of our existing properties leased to housing associations, explore opportunities for alternative use and identify additional properties suitable to be leased
 - Work with housing providers and commissioning partners to monitor and review supported housing to ensure it meets local need.
- 3.18 The proposed Homelessness Strategy is attached in **Appendix 1**.

4. Consultation

- 4.1 We have consulted customers and various partners in developing the strategy and have used this feedback to inform our approach and the action plans. We plan to carry out further consultation as detailed in paragraphs 4.6 and 4.7 below.

- 4.2 We have employed a range of consultation methods including face-to face interviews, paper and email surveys using bespoke questions to seek the views of customers and partners.
- 4.3 Our customer consultation has included:
- Customers of our homelessness prevention and housing options service
 - Rough sleepers and non-priority single homeless people who use the drop-in centre or reside in local hostels.
- 4.4 The aim of this consultation was to identify practical ways in which we can make a difference, in particular using the ideas of people who are experiencing, or have experienced homelessness.
- 4.5 Our partner consultation has included:
- homelessness service providers
 - registered providers
 - private landlords
 - statutory agencies (Police, Health, Adult Social Care, Probation and Children's Services)
 - Guildford and Ash Citizens' Advice Bureau
 - the voluntary sector
 - the faith sector
 - town centre business community
- 4.6 We are carrying out a final stage of consultation with our main partners now the draft strategy and action plans are complete. We have circulated the strategy and posed the questions set out below:
- do our priorities feel like they are they right ones?
 - are there any key issues missing?
 - how can we encourage people to seek help as soon as they get into difficulties?
 - is our action plan comprehensive and are the actions achievable?
 - do you have any other comments or suggestions?
- 4.7 We will publish the strategy on the website and invite comments from the public. The comments will be considered as part of the ongoing review of the action plans.

5. Overview and Scrutiny comment

- 5.1 We presented the draft strategy to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee at its meeting on 5 June 2018. There was a useful discussion and councillors asked various questions about the strategy, which related to longer-term outcomes, revolving door clients, use of data sets and the quality and appropriateness of care. In response to comments, minor amendments (in italics) have been made to the strategy. The Committee expressed support for the strategy and action plans.

6. Equality and Diversity Implications

- 6.1 Homelessness prevention and housing advice complies with our equality duty and the Council's equality statement.

7. Financial Implications

- 7.1 Additional funding has been provided by the Government to implement the new legislation over three years starting in 2017/18. This includes "new burdens" funding and Flexible Homelessness Grant, both of which are ring-fenced and will be used to support the implementation of the HRA17 and Homelessness Strategy.
- 7.2 We expect to be able to deliver the plan over the next two years within existing resources and the additional funding received from the Government. Should this not be possible we will need to review our options and if appropriate make a clear business case for growth funding through the normal budget-setting process.

8. Legal Implications

- 8.1 The Homelessness Strategy is an important document. The Homelessness Act 2002 requires that it addresses:
- the prevention of homelessness within the local authority area
 - the securing of accommodation for those who are or may become homeless within the local authority area
 - the provision of satisfactory support services to prevent and assist those who are or may become homeless, or have been homeless and may become homeless again.
- 8.2 The Council is required under the Act to have regard to its current allocation scheme and its tenancy strategies when modifying its homelessness strategy.
- 8.3 The homelessness strategy may include specific objectives to be pursued, and specific action planned to be taken, by the Council as a local housing authority, or the social services authority.
- 8.4 The strategy may also provide for specific action which we expect to be taken by any public authority with functions which are capable of contributing to any of the above objectives, or any voluntary authority or other person whose activities are capable of contributing to the above objectives. Before doing so, the relevant body or person must approve of this.
- 8.5 Before adopting or modifying the homelessness strategy, the Council shall consult with any public or local authorities, voluntary organisations or other persons as considered appropriate. We shall also make a copy of everything published available for inspection without charge, and provide a copy of anything that is published to any member of the public who asks for it, subject to an appropriate charge.

- 8.6 The strategy as modified (or its modifications, as we consider appropriate) shall be published.
- 8.7 We, together with Children's and Adult Social Services, are under a duty to take the content of the strategy into account when exercising our statutory functions; a failure to do so where the strategy contains material relevant to the decision may render a statutory decision unlawful.

9. Human Resource Implications

- 9.1 The Strategy does not have any direct human resources implications over and above the changes being introduced in response to the HRA 17. Given the uncertainty over the level of increase in demand and support required for homeless applicants, we will continue to monitor the impact the legislation has on our capacity to deliver service and review staffing as necessary. Officers will address such changes through normal business procedure.

10. Summary of Options

- 10.1 The Homelessness Act 2002 requires us to carry out a homelessness review for our district and, based on the results of that review, to formulate and publish a Homelessness Strategy at least every five years. The Executive are therefore asked to approve the strategy as presented or make amendments.

11. Conclusion

- 11.1 The revised Homelessness Strategy will provide the direction for our services over the next two years and allow time for us to understand the impact of the HRA17 and other government policy changes, notably the roll out of Universal Credit and leaving the European Union. Given our wider duties towards all homeless people, the strategy sets out how we will seek to help more households at risk of homelessness.
- 11.2 The Homelessness Strategy and action plan will ensure our services are effective. It will also provide guidance for our partners on homelessness services in the borough. Regular reviews of the action plans will ensure they remain relevant and reflect any changes in trends, or issues that we need to address.

12. Background Papers

Homelessness Strategy 2003-6
Homelessness Strategy 2007-12
Homelessness Strategy 2013-18
Housing Strategy Statement 2015-20
Housing Allocations Scheme

13. Appendices

Appendix 1: Draft Homelessness Strategy 2018-20
Appendix 2: Evidence Base
Appendix 3: Consultation