



Homelessness Strategy

2017-2021

Consultation Draft

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Foreword

To follow.

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1. Introduction

The Homelessness Act (2002) places a duty of each local authority to carry out a review of homelessness and to develop a new Homelessness Strategy every five years.

The Homelessness Review provides a detailed assessment of:

- The levels and likely future levels of homelessness in the borough
- Activities that are carried out which prevent homelessness, secure accommodation for homeless people and provide support to people who are or may become homeless
- Resources available to carry out these activities.

The Homelessness Strategy must set out how the Council will prevent homelessness and provide support to people who are homeless, or at risk of becoming homeless during the next five years.

Reigate & Banstead Borough Council produced its first Homelessness Strategy in 2003. The last Homelessness Strategy was published in 2011 and the key priorities of it were:

- Develop the Housing Options Approach
- Strengthen partnership working
- Engage the private rented sector
- Increase the supply of and maximise the use of existing affordable housing
- Deliver efficient customer focused services

The Council has made progress to develop services and initiatives which are aimed at preventing homelessness and providing realistic solutions to those in housing need.

Homelessness in the borough has risen over the last five years peaking in 2014/15. Whilst homeless acceptances reduced in 2015/16 the number of housing options approaches has continued to rise. In the coming years we expect a further increase in the number of households approaching the housing service for housing advice and assistance as further welfare reforms are implemented and demand for housing rises.

The Homelessness Strategy is divided into two parts:

Part 1 The Housing Review contains the data on homelessness in the borough. This document is published separately.

Part 2 The Homelessness Strategy sets out the context of the Council's housing service, gives a picture of existing services and initiatives to prevent homelessness and sets out the objectives and priority actions for the Reigate & Banstead Borough Council's Homelessness Strategy 2017-21.

2. Executive summary

Our Homelessness Strategy is set in the context of unprecedented changes to welfare benefits impacting on individual households as well as the organisations providing essential support services to them, rising housing costs and continuing homelessness. In spite of these challenges this is a positive Strategy with a strong focus on homelessness prevention. Our aim is to strengthen the resilience of households at risk of homelessness through early intervention, support to overcome practical issues that make them vulnerable to homelessness and assistance with to make positive decisions about their housing options.

Our 2011-16 Homelessness Strategy was ambitious. We delivered on many of our priorities. These included strengthening joint working with the housing benefit team and collaborative working on use of the Discretionary Housing Fund to prevent homelessness, the creation of an Accommodation Support post working on tenancy sustainment, a minimum offer of £500 deposit to non priority households, the creation of the East Surrey Outreach Service (eSOS) to assist street homeless, and the set up of the first Rent Guarantor Scheme. A lack of resources, or changes to the priorities of the Housing Options Service resulted in some actions not being delivered.

The main challenge during the 2011-16 Strategy was the significant increase in numbers of households applying as homeless. The Homelessness Review, which is published separately, shows that this peaked in 2014/15 with 189 homelessness decisions and 139 homeless acceptances. The main cause of homelessness was the loss of private rented accommodation. This is followed by parental evictions of children, and then by friends / relative evictions.

The majority of homeless accepted households continue to be those with children. Lone parent households represent just over half of all households accepted as homeless and are predominately female headed. In contrast, male applicants dominate one person homeless households. Looking at the prevention work undertaken during the last five years over 850 households were assisted to avoid homelessness. Of these 72% were assisted to obtain alternative accommodation and 28% were able to remain in their existing home. Assistance into the private rented sector (PRS) without a landlord incentive was the most frequently used prevention tool followed by entry into PRS with a landlord incentive. The third preventative measure was the offer of a sheltered housing unit to qualifying homeless households. Although the fourth frequently used tool was supported housing it provides a housing lifeline to vulnerable individuals who need more intensive support to sustain their tenancies or who are more challenging and difficult to place with mainstream providers.

A range of tools have been used to prevent homelessness to date and will continue to be used subject to the availability of resources. No single prevention tool can provide the solution to homelessness; it is the combination of tools which are applied to an individual's circumstances that delivers results. However, we do know some tools have been particularly effective. These include the use of the Discretionary Housing Payments to assist with rent deposits, rent in advance and short-term rent to benefit gaps, the NextStep Rent Deposit Bond Scheme which consistently assists 50 households a year into private rented housing and finally the use of the Homelessness Prevention Fund for standard rent deposits

/ advances and more unusual interventions such as rubbish clearance. These three tools in particular are essential to the delivery of the 2017-21 Strategy.

The 2017-21 Strategy contains four main objectives:

- **Objective 1: Prevent homelessness and sustain tenancies** - Four priority areas are linked to delivering this objective. Our overall focus is to provide a housing options prevention service with access to advice, information and assistance. Secondly, we need to ensure clients are able to access support services to enable them to get housed or sustain their tenancies. Effective partnerships with support providers are essential to safeguard services. Thirdly, we need to ensure the increasing numbers of domestic abuse victim approaching for help are assisted effectively and sensitively. Finally, we need to provide support to single homeless people who are experiencing increasing difficulties accessing accommodation and are facing street homelessness.
- **Objective 2: Increase the supply of private rented accommodation available to people at risk of homelessness** - the availability of and access to private rented housing is crucial to managing demand and preventing homelessness. It can offer a flexible housing option to those who cannot afford to buy, need a quick housing solution or face a long wait for social housing. Our priority is to expand the current rent deposit bond scheme so more households can be assisted to avoid homelessness which in turn reduces pressure on B&B usage. Our Rent Guarantor Scheme will continue to offer support to selected households to enable them to secure private accommodation.
- **Objective 3: Work in partnership to minimise the impact of welfare reform on our residents and increase access to employment for people in housing need and at risk of homelessness** – access to employment is critical for households facing the impacts of welfare reform. Our priority to deliver a multi-agency response to residents affected by it to prevent homelessness. This aims to get more households working, to support them manage their housing costs and to budget. Overcoming the barriers to work is essential and the East Surrey Pathway Project will target those individuals furthest from work. Preparing households for Universal Credit will help prevent homelessness. A lack of financial awareness underpins many housing problems. Taking a joined up approach to improving financial awareness and the provision of money advice is essential to enable more resources to be identified for this activity.
- **Objective 4: Reduce the use of bed and breakfast accommodation** - our priorities are two-fold. Firstly we will assist more households owed a homelessness duty into suitable private rented accommodation to reduce the number waiting in temporary accommodation. The enhanced rent deposit scheme will assist us to deliver this approach. Secondly, we need to minimise the use of out of borough B&Bs. We intend to use developer contributions to deliver some 25 units of temporary accommodation in the borough. This will reduce expenditure on B&B accommodation and enable more effective support to be given to homeless households.

Homelessness prevention is the central aim of the homelessness strategy. This is a constant challenge in the face of welfare reform, uncertainty around the future funding of support services and a competitive housing market in which increasing number of households are

relying on private rented accommodation. Nevertheless, through our Strategy we remain committed to working with our partners to tackle the causes of homelessness, to gain more access to the private rented sector and reduce our reliance on out of borough bed and breakfast accommodation.

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3. The Policy & Legislative Background

The Homelessness Strategy is set within the context of national policy and legislation and local policies. They have shaped the themes and actions within this five year document and will continue to influence it when it is reviewed each year.

Since publication of the last homelessness strategy a number of significant policy and legislative changes have been introduced which have influenced the way the Council responds now and in the future to homelessness.

3.1 'Making Every Contact Count: A Joint Approach to Preventing Homelessness'

This is the Government's cross-department report on tackling homelessness through early prevention and integrated services. Published in 2012, it sets out the Government's approach to tackling the causes of homelessness focusing on prevention, early intervention and a local response. The report includes ten local challenges for local authorities to meet to achieve the highest homelessness standards. The challenges have been adopted and developed into a framework by the National Practitioner Support Service (NPSS). The NPSS have developed the Gold Standard framework which is a 10 step continuous improvement approach for front line services which local authorities can follow and ultimately apply for Gold Standard status.

3.2 No Second Night Out

A national vision launched in 2011 to tackle rough sleeping through early intervention to help people get off the street and into a place of safety immediately. It sets out five standards which aim to get rough sleepers off the street immediately, give them access to emergency accommodation and services and reconnection to their community.

3.3 Welfare Reform

A number of changes have already been introduced and more are due to be implemented in the next few years which have affected access to housing and the ability of households to retain their tenancies. The most significant welfare reforms impacting on the affordability of housing and homelessness include:

- Local Housing Allowance (LHA) reductions including total LHA caps and the limiting of LHA to the 30th percentile of market rents
- The Total Benefit Cap limiting the maximum benefits that Households can receive. Phase 1 limited couples and families to £500 per week and single people to £350 per week in 2013. Phase 2 reduced the weekly Cap to £384.62 for couples and families and £257.69 for single people in 2016.
- Spare Room Subsidy (called the 'Bedroom Tax') reduced the housing benefit entitlement of social housing tenants considered to be under occupying their homes by 14% for one spare bedroom and 25% for two or more spare bedrooms
- The Single Accommodation Rate limit which is applied to people aged under 35 in private rented accommodation is being rolled out to social housing tenants from 2018

- Disability Benefit changes and the replacement of Council Tax Benefit with local Council Tax support has reduced benefit income to a wide range of working age adults
- Introduction of Universal Credit to provide a single stream-lined benefit paid directly to households (to include housing benefit) rather than their landlords

The Council has responded to the first tranche of changes brought about by welfare reform. Households affected by phase 1 of the Total Benefit Cap were given advice, information and assistance to overcome the cap. Households were assisted into employment, assisted with housing advice and support to find alternative accommodation and ensure they were in receipt of their full benefit entitlements. The Council has also worked closely with social landlords to identify and assist households affected by the 'Bedroom Tax' to move to smaller accommodation.

3.4 The Localism Act 2011

The Act introduced significant changes to the Housing Act 1996. The objective of it is to enable local authorities to better manage housing demand and access to housing within the context of local circumstances.

The main changes introduced by the Localism Act include:

- Local authority power to end their homelessness duty with an offer of accommodation in the private rented sector
- Social housing tenure reform to allow social landlords to grant fixed term tenancies with limited security of tenure
- The requirement for local authorities to adopt a Tenancy Strategy by 2013 setting out the matters to which social landlords must have regard in setting their tenancy policies
- Social housing allocation reform which allows local authorities to set locally relevant allocation policies

The Government introduced the Homelessness (Suitability of Accommodation) (England) Order 2012 as guidance to local authorities on the standards of accommodation that may be used by local authorities as temporary accommodation and to end the homelessness duty.

3.6 Our 5 Year Plan 2015-20 – A great place to live and work

The Council's 5 Year Plan sets out a vision for Reigate & Banstead. It explains how we will prioritise resources and deliver services to the people living and working in the borough. The plan was developed using evidence from our borough profile, stakeholder feedback and market research. The [borough profile](#) provides a wealth of information about the demographics of the borough.

The Council's [five year plan](#) has 13 priorities based around three themes:

- People: supporting residents to enjoy healthy and happy lifestyles
- Place: A great place to live and work
- Organisation: a great Council

3.7 Reigate and Banstead Local Plan: Core Strategy 2014

Adopted in July 2014, the Core Strategy guides future development in the borough and indicates broad locations for future housing, employment, retail infrastructure and other land uses as well as setting out some more detailed policies used to assess planning applications including an affordable housing policy which sets a target of 100 new affordable homes a year.

3.8 Affordable Housing Supplementary Planning Document

Adopted in 2014 the SPD contains the detailed guidance on how the Council will interpret and apply the Core Strategy policy on Affordable Housing. In summary, it details the requirements for larger and smaller sites, contains guidance about delivering affordable homes and explains how to calculate financial contributions on small sites.

3.9 East Surrey Housing Strategy

The last East Surrey Housing Strategy ended in 2013, and we have moved to a joint position statement. The statement covers Mole Valley, Reigate & Banstead and Tandridge Councils and confirms that our housing priorities have remained largely unchanged and are:

- Maximising supply
- Shaping supply
- Making best use of existing resources
- Preventing homelessness
- Supporting vulnerable people

3.10 The Reigate & Banstead Tenancy Strategy

Sets out the type of social rented housing tenancies that the Council expects Registered Providers to provide in the borough. The Strategy seeks to:

- Ensure that affordable housing meets locally identified housing need
- Provide guidance and direction to housing providers regarding their use of Affordable Rent properties and flexible tenancies
- Indicate to existing and prospective tenants what they can expect from a tenancy for an affordable rented property

3.11 Countywide Strategies

- Surrey Domestic Abuse Strategy 2013-18
- Surrey Prolific Priority Offenders Protocol 2007
- Surrey County Council 'Confident in Surrey's Future' Corporate Strategy 2016-17

4. Review of Achievements - Homelessness Strategy 2011-16

Since publication of the 2011 Homelessness Strategy we have made considerable progress in strengthening our housing options approach, building stronger partnerships to tackle homelessness and understanding the housing market. Our achievements are set within the context of a succession of national and legislative changes within the public sector which will continue to impact on the housing sector during the lifetime of the new Homelessness Strategy.

The challenge throughout the last five years has been to prevent homelessness in an area characterised by high housing costs. We have adopted a flexible approach and have made use of a range of tools and initiatives tailored to each household's circumstances. Our partners have supported us to deliver new initiatives such as the rent guarantor scheme, the on-line housing options toolkit and outreach support service for single rough sleepers. We have employed a dedicated Tenancy Advisor to prevent homelessness through earlier more intensive involvement with the household and this has achieved positive results.

Our achievements against the themes of the previous strategy are summarised below.

Theme 1: Develop the Housing Options Approach

We have:

- Intervened to prevent over 850 households from becoming homeless between 2011 and 2016
- Ended the use of temporary accommodation for 16-17 year olds and ended the use of shared facilities B&B accommodation for families except in exceptional circumstances and limited any such placements to below 6 weeks
- Employed a Tenancy Advisor to work intensively with households at risk of homelessness to prevent it or assist with a planned move
- Piloted the Rent Guarantor Scheme in which the Council acts as the guarantor for financially stable households facing homelessness who have found private rented accommodation but require a guarantor
- Worked in partnership with Surrey authorities and Abris (software supplier) to develop an on-line housing options toolkit providing advice and information at anytime of day
- Implemented a minimum offer of £500 towards a deposit or rent in advance for single homeless people
- Contributed funding and on-going support to the Winter Night Shelter established in 2011/12 by Renewed Hope Trust to assist rough sleepers. In recent years we have worked in partnership with Tandridge DC to assist fund the Shelter
- Continued to provide funding to the Sanctuary Scheme run by East Surrey Domestic Abuse Service which works with the police, clients and landlords to make victim's properties safer through enhanced security and creation of 'safe rooms'
- Set up the East Surrey Outreach Service (eSOS) to help single rough sleepers access hostels, re-link back with family or friends and access healthcare and welfare services. eSOS has assisted 39 Council clients into housing / referred to drug, alcohol, mental, physical health services / giving money advice in the first year

- Reviewed the Housing Register in response to the Localism Act (2011) in 2013 and again in 2015 to respond to local needs more effectively

Theme 2: Strengthen Partnership Working

We have:

- Co-located with the Neighbourhood Police Team, Adult Social Care, South East Surrey Family Support Team and Housing Benefit Teams which has enabled closer working, fostered improved working relationships and intelligence sharing
- Developed a close working relationship with the Family Support Team which has enabled a number of chaotic, financially unstable households to avoid homelessness through the provision of intensive support
- Continued to work with supported housing providers such as Transform Housing & Support, Cherchefelle Vision Housing, YMCA East Surrey, Wayside and support service providers such as Parashoot to offer a range of housing options and support for more vulnerable individuals
- Established a joint assessment system for assessing Discretionary Housing Payments (DHPs) which has made a positive impact on preventing homelessness
- Worked in partnership with Mole Valley DC, Tandridge DC, Epsom & Ewell BC and Stonham Housing Association to implement a No Second Night Out project using DCLG and Councils' funding
- Worked in partnership with Women's Aid to secure DCLG funding to deliver additional accommodation for victims of domestic abuse
- Worked with Surrey County Council to agree a housing pathway for 16-17 year olds and care leavers. We took part in a rapid improvement event held in 2012 to address the challenges raised by the G v Southwark 2009 UKHL judgement and this led to the creation of the Youth Support Service for Surrey and updates to the 16 – 17 year old Young Persons Protocol. This proactive approach to youth homelessness led to a focused and effective service for young people and created a platform for continued joint working. The Housing Team continues to meet the Care Leavers Service & Youth Support Service team on a monthly basis to agree housing pathways for care leavers.
- Developed close working relationships with the voluntary sector including Community Debt Advice, Citizen's Advice Bureau and Renewed Hope Trust so that we can offer clients referrals to specialised services on matters like money advice and debt management
- Regularly attended Multi-Agency Assessment Conferences (MARAC) which address serious domestic abuse cases to offer housing advice, we also make referrals to MARAC

Theme 3: Engage the Private Rented Sector

We have:

- Prevented homelessness for over 500 private rented households since 2011 through the active engagement of landlords and tenants by the Housing Options Team to resolve rent arrears, benefits issues, communication issues and budgeting problems.

- Continued to work closely with YMCA East Surrey NextStep Rent Deposit Scheme to secure an average of at least 50 new private tenancies each year
- Reviewed the Housing Register & Allocation Policy to encourage more households to privately rent whilst they wait for the offer of affordable housing
- Used DHPs to fund rent in advance, deposits, pay rent arrears and bridge housing benefit shortfalls. The full DHP is used each year and is invaluable in preventing households becoming homeless
- Used the Homelessness Prevention Fund creatively to prevent homelessness. The Fund has been used for rent in advance, deposits, repairs, garden clearance and to assist households in mortgage arrears. Much of the money is repaid by clients enabling it to be recycled to assist others.

Theme 4: Increase the Supply and Maximise the Use of Existing Affordable Housing

We have:

- Delivered 446 new affordable homes between 2011/16 of which 263 were rented and 183 shared ownership
- Provided funding to create an additional new room in a Hyde Housing Association mother and baby unit in the borough managed by Transform Housing & Support
- Provided funding to YMCA East Surrey to support the delivery of low support move-on accommodation for young people leaving the Hillbrook House
- Provided funding to Raven Housing Trust for loft conversions to accommodate larger families and address a gap in the supply of larger affordable homes
- Provided funding to Raven Housing Trust to facilitate the build of four houses in Horley for affordable rent
- Acquired 8 units of temporary accommodation in the borough for homeless households using affordable housing planning contributions to reduce use and cost of out of borough B&B accommodation
- Used Local Lettings Policies on new developments to target homes at specific groups such as older people downsizing from family homes, working households and economically mixed communities
- Reviewed the Housing Register & Allocations Policy to allow more flexibility when allocating different types of property to ensure best use is made of the stock
- As a Council taken the lead role in the regeneration of Merstham and Preston estates to redevelop low demand accommodation, provide mixed tenure developments, new community facilities and recreational space.
- Worked with Raven Housing Trust to re-use low demand sheltered housing accommodation as temporary accommodation pending its redevelopment
- Worked with Raven Housing Trust to replace temporary accommodation no longer fit for purpose with high quality self-contained accommodation

Theme 5: Deliver Efficient Customer Focused Services

We have:

- Introduced new back office IT systems to streamline administration processes and improve case recording and document management
- Undertaken a Housing Service Review in 2015/16 to analyse processes, resources and causes of homelessness and are implementing changes to the staffing structure, new customer contact system and resourcing
- Taken part in a Diagnostic Peer Review of homelessness services with five Surrey authorities and passed the standard required to embark on the Gold Standard. We scored Fair to Good on all aspects of the homelessness service
- Continued to review our website to ensure it continues to be accessible, informative and relevant
- Agreed arrangements for sharing housing benefit and Council tax information to deliver more efficient joined up services

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5. Homelessness Prevention Tools

A number of tools are available to the housing service to use to prevent homelessness. Our tools range from tenant and landlord negotiation, to budget and affordability assessments, financial support to access private rented housing and referrals to specialist agencies and housing providers.

The Homelessness Review shows that the main cause of homelessness is the end of private rented accommodation; this is followed by parental eviction, then eviction by relatives / friends. We intend to develop the tools we have around the private rented sector with the aim of improving the sustainability of tenancies and being able to secure more tenancies. One of root causes of homelessness is financial instability and an increasing number of households facing significant debt. We offer some money advice, signpost to on-line self-help tools, national organisations and refer more complex cases to partner organisations such as Community Debt Advice. We intend to develop greater expertise on money advice.

Below is a summary of the main tools that we have used and will continue to employ to prevent homelessness over the next five years.

5.1 Financial Support

- **Homelessness Prevention Fund** – This funding is used in a variety of homelessness prevention initiatives including rent in advance, deposits, arrears, garden and rubbish clearance. It is a cost effective and flexible resource often used on lower value expenditure. In 2015/14 £28,000 was used to prevent 25 households becoming homeless. Wherever possible we recover monies spent by entering into repayment schemes and securing deposits in the Council's favour.
- **Discretionary Housing Payment fund (DHP)** – DHP is paid annually to the Council and managed by Housing Benefit in partnership with Housing Services. It is used to prevent homelessness through payments of rent in advance, tenancy deposit, assisting benefit capped cases, 'bedroom tax' cases and to provide short-term assistance to bridge Local Housing Allowance shortfalls whilst money advice is sought. Since 2013 the Council has spent the entire DHP fund each year.
- **Rent Guarantor Scheme** – This scheme guarantees the private rent for selected households facing homelessness but unable to secure a private rent home without a guarantor. We established the first guarantor scheme in Surrey and since 2014 eight households have been assisted.
- **Money Advice** – we refer households with complex money or debt problems to local organisations offering specialist services. We refer to the Citizens Advice Bureau and Community Debt Advice. Raven Housing Trust operates the MoneyWise advice service for its tenants and Parashoot also offers money advice to its clients.
- **Surrey Local Assistance Scheme** – this scheme can provide support for immediate needs in an emergency when no other options are available. The scheme can assist

with food, emergency travel costs, keeping the family safe, essential furniture / white goods. We refer clients directly to the scheme and to Citizens Advice for assistance with applications.

5.2 Securing Accommodation and ongoing support

- **Rent Deposit Bond Guarantee Scheme** – This 15 year old scheme operated by NextStep YMCA East Surrey assists households, referred by the Council, into private rented accommodation. The scheme offers short-term rent deposit bonds, assists with sourcing private rented accommodation, assists with tenancy set ups, undertakes financial assessments and provides support and assistance to tenants and landlords. The scheme secures an average of 50 tenancies a year.
- **Winter Night Shelter** - Operated by Renewed Hope Trust the Shelter runs from December to March and is staffed by around 300 volunteers. It offers a bed, hot evening meal, breakfast, a packed lunch, clothing, a listening ear and signposting to other services. It is available to street homeless people with a local connection to the borough. In recent years the Shelter has included funding and referrals from Tandridge District Councils.
- **East Surrey Outreach Support Service (eSOS)** – set up in 2015 eSOS assists rough sleepers and sofa surfers to manage their situation, access accommodation and services or reconnect with other areas or old networks. To date eSOS has assisted over 40 households of which just over half were successfully accommodated. Funding for the service is time limited.
- **Supported housing** – We continue to refer single people to supported housing providers within the borough and elsewhere as appropriate. The main providers in the borough are Transform Housing & Support, Sanctuary, Prospect Housing & Support Services, Wayside and YMCA East Surrey Hillbrook House. They offer accommodation to a range of client groups including young women, single under 30s, people with a learning disability, people with mental health issues / drug and / or alcohol issues.
- **Tenancy sustainment** - a Tenancy Sustainment Officer has been in post for the last two years working with private and social tenants and landlords to resolve tenancy and financial issues to prevent homelessness. Our priority is to save the tenancy but in situations where tenancies cannot be saved we offer housing options advice and assistance into alternative accommodation. The post has made a real difference to our ability to intervene earlier and avoid homelessness. It is an area of work we intend to expand.
- **Tenancy Support** – the Council refers households to a range of providers. These include Parashoot a tenancy support service operated by Raven Housing Trust and Prospect Housing, Transform Housing & Support for people experiencing issues managing their tenancies with the aim of preventing homelessness and ESDAS for victims of domestic abuse.

- **Domestic Abuse Sanctuary Scheme** – We continue to operate a joint working arrangement with East Surrey Domestic Abuse Outreach Scheme, Tandridge and Mole Valley Councils to offer a Sanctuary Scheme for survivors of domestic abuse as well as repairs. The Council commits over £3,000 per year to support the scheme. On average 15 households a year are assisted to remain in their homes.
- **Surrey Mobility Scheme** – the Council remains committed to the joint working arrangement with the other Surrey authorities which assists survivors of domestic abuse to move within the county through reciprocal arrangements.

5.3 Inter-agency Groups

- **Multi-Agency Risk Assessment Committee (MARAC)** – the local area MARAC meets regularly to discuss how to help victims of domestic abuse at risk of serious harm. A range of organisations such as the police, adults and / or children's services, social landlords attend. A representative from Housing Services attends to prevent homelessness and give advice and assistance on housing issues.
- **Multi-Agency Public Protection Arrangements (MAPPA)** – are monitored by housing services and updates given on relevant cases. The Surrey Housing Authorities work together to provide support and attendance at meetings.
- **Prolific and Priority Offenders (PPO) and Neighbourhood Prolific Offenders (NPO)** – In 2007/08 all Surrey local authorities signed up to the Offenders Protocol in conjunction with Probation and the Police. Where a PPO is willing to engage with the Council, we will offer a £500 rent deposit to help access private accommodation.
- **Community Incident Action Group (CIAG)** – this borough based group of professionals meets monthly to monitor and respond to issues of anti-social behaviour in the borough. Frequently there is a housing related issue to be addressed.
- **Surrey Housing Needs Managers Group** - meets regularly and works collectively in a number of ways including: benchmarking performance; developing and providing joint district and borough services; developing protocols; joint working with other agencies and making joint bids for funding homelessness initiatives.
- **Surrey Chief Housing Officers Association** – meets regularly and works collectively in a number of ways including: to agree on Surrey wide strategic projects / issues. Arrange a yearly Surrey Local Authority & Registered Provider forum, agree joint lobbying of MP's on issues as required.

5.4 Review of the Housing Service

During 2015/16 the Housing Service took part in two service reviews which looked in detail at the operation of the Housing Service, identified strengths and weaknesses, assessed priorities and outcomes of the Service.

A whole housing Service Review was undertaken first. The Service Review was triggered by the unsustainable cost of the Council's response to homelessness. The Service Review looked at processes in the team, resources and causes of homelessness. It concluded with an action plan with objectives on preventing homelessness, improving client service and organisational efficiency. A number of improvements have been implemented including the shift of general enquiries to customer services, appointment of a Service Manager and agreement to enhance the rent deposit scheme. Further changes will take effect during 2016/17.

The Housing Service also took part in a voluntary in depth review of our homelessness service. Called the Diagnostic Peer Review (DPR), it was overseen by the National Practitioner Support Service (NPSS) for Homelessness services and is the precursor to the achievement of the Gold Standard in homelessness services. Ten challenges set by the NPSS are seen to be best practice in a housing options and advice service. Local authorities who choose to aim for the Standard are partnered in peer groups. The peer groups prepare and assess the challenges in stages one and two and the remaining challenges in stage three.

The 10 Local Challenges

- 1** To adopt a corporate commitment to prevent homelessness which has buy in across all local authority services
 - 2** To actively work in partnership with voluntary sector and other local partners to address support, education, employment and training needs
 - 3** To offer a Housing Options prevention service to all clients including written advice
 - 4** To adopt a No Second Night Out model or an effective local alternative
 - 5** To have housing pathways agreed or in development with each key partner and client group that include appropriate accommodation and support
 - 6** To develop a suitable private rented sector offer for all clients groups, including advice and support to both client and landlord
 - 7** To actively engage in preventing mortgage repossessions including through the Mortgage Rescue Scheme
 - 8** To have a homelessness strategy which sets out a proactive approach to preventing homelessness and is reviewed annually to be responsive to emerging needs
 - 9** To not place any young person aged 16 or 17 in Bed and Breakfast accommodation
 - 10** To not place any families in Bed and Breakfast accommodation unless in an emergency and for no longer than 6 weeks
-

A group of Surrey authorities aiming for the standards have been partnered in peer groups to prepare and scrutinise each other. All five of the Surrey peer authorities have completed stage one of the standard. To qualify to move on through the process all authorities had to score above 60% in the DPR.

The DPR assessed the service through the following areas:

- Homeless Strategy overview
- Website review
- Reception and interview room assessment
- Customer interview observation
- Housing Options files review
- Homelessness assessment file review
- Staff interviews
- Manager interviews
- Partner agency interviews
- Visits
- Overall quality of Housing Options services

RBBC achieved an overall grade of 63%, scoring between 'Fair' and 'Good' (scores of 40% - 79%) highlighting that there were no major concerns that needed addressing in the service.

Top 3 marks			Lowest 3 marks	
Visits		75%	Homeless strategy overview	53%
Website Review		71%	Homelessness file review	52%
Customer interview observation		69%	Housing Options file review	51%

A comprehensive action plan had been agreed with the Council. The Housing Options Service is now working on improving weaker areas of the service and has already made improvements to the service as a direct result of the DPR. Aspects of the DPR assessment have been integrated in the action of the Homelessness Strategy 2017/21 and building on the success of the DPR the Service is now considering the requirements of the Bronze, Silver and Gold Standards.

5.5 Financial Resources Available to Deliver the Strategy

The Council has invested resources from a range of funding streams into activities which have wholly or partly contributed to preventing homelessness and supporting vulnerable residents in housing need. The following is a summary of the most significant funding sources.

- **Discretionary Housing Payments (DHP)** - The Council has a strong record of utilising DHP to prevent homelessness and has effective joint working arrangements between Housing Services and the Housing Benefit Team. A Manager in each team ensures the services work together effectively, share information and cooperate. If a household is identified at being at risk of homelessness due to rent problems for which a DHP might be payable, housing options staff request payment and the request is treated as a trusted referral.

- In 2014/15 over £63,000 of the £176,000 DHP Fund was used on Housing Options cases to prevent homelessness. Some funds were used to assist households affected by the 'bedroom tax', but the largest proportion was used to assist private rented tenants affected by Local Housing Allowance restrictions and to assist with rent deposits and advances. In 2015/16 over £74,000 of the total DHP Fund of £147,298 was used by Housing Options to prevent homelessness.
- **Homelessness Prevention Grant** - Local authorities received an annual Homelessness Prevention Grant from the DCLG. There is no transparent formula for assessing the amount of grant allocated to each local authority and there are wide variations in the amounts boroughs receive. In 2013/14 and 2014/15 the Council received £57,146 per year. The grant is used on funding for housing service.
- **Repossession Prevention Fund** - The DCLG made a one-off payment in 2009 of £47,500 and topped this up by £30,000 in 2012. No further funding is expected to be received from the DCLG. The Housing Service uses this to prevent household becoming homeless by offering rent deposits, rent in advance, and resolving tenancy breaches such as garden / rubbish clearance. We aim to recycle this fund and enter into repayment agreements with clients.
- Given the flexibility of the fund and its success at preventing homeless the Council has committed to provide an annual contribution. This on-going contribution will be made from the Corporate Plan Delivery Fund and will ensure the RPF remains available to assist households in difficulty.
- **Housing Related Support Grant** - Prior to 2011, Surrey County Council received annual 'Supporting People' funding. The ring fence on this fund was removed and grants to local government reduced. A grant continues to be used to provide Housing Related Support to vulnerable clients at risk of homelessness and to provide floating support services to a range of vulnerable people typically: young people, people with mental health support needs, frail older people with support needs, people with drug and alcohol problems, homeless people, people with physical or sensory disabilities and teenage parents.
- Support is provided through either floating support services or through accommodation based services. The Housing Related Support Service works closely with service providers, accommodation providers and local authorities to monitor services to ensure they deliver positive outcomes. The Council attends provider assessment meetings and continues to influence commissioning priorities to ensure best use of available resources to meet needs.
- **Voluntary Sector Grant** - The Council continues to provide funding to voluntary sector organisations to deliver services in the borough. In terms of housing related support, the Council has provided core funding to the Citizens Advice Bureau for a number of years. In 2015/16 they were awarded £111,000 and awarded £104,000 in 2016/17.

- In 2016/17 Voluntary Sector Grants are also given to other housing related services. Furnistore who provide discounted households furniture, white goods and other household items received £1,000, The Reigate & Redhill Live at Home Scheme supporting older people to stay independent received £10,000 core funding and Women's Aid received £5,000.
- In addition Housing Services contributes £3,000 per year to the Sanctuary Scheme operated by East Surrey Domestic Abuse Service, £2,000 per year to Renewed Hope Trust towards funding the Winter Night Shelter and £64,000 to the YMCA East Surrey NextStep Rent Deposit Bond Scheme.

5.6 Accessing External Funding Sources

Housing Services takes a pro-active approach to identifying funding sources that will assist our homelessness toolkit and prevent homelessness. Successful partnerships that have brought additional resources include:

- Women's Aid Accommodation – Housing Services and Women's Aid made a joint bid to a DLG Fund to support victims of domestic abuse. The joint bid secured £91,000 funding to provide additional accommodation.
- East Surrey Outreach Service (eSOS) – Housing Services along with Tandridge, Mole Valley and Epsom & Ewell Councils made a successful joint bid to the DCLG in 2015 to secure funding to set up the service. Funding expired in September 2016 and the four LA's along with a successful bid to the Police & Crime Commissioner secured funding until the end of March 2017. Future funding is being sought.

6. Homelessness Review Summary

A detailed review of homelessness in the borough has been completed and is available in a separate publication. It contains comprehensive information on trends in homelessness including causes of homelessness, household types, priority categories, prevention and the tools used to prevent homelessness. Below is a summary of the Review.

Borough background

At 138,000 Reigate and Banstead has the highest population in Surrey and has seen the largest population growth during 2001 and 2009. Unemployment is not a major issue in the borough and as of April 2016 0.7% of the population claimed Job Seekers Allowance compared to 1.1% in the South East. In general the borough is a prosperous area however, there are small areas in the borough experiencing higher levels of deprivation. The Preston ward is ranked 6th and Merstham 10th most deprived out of the 206 Surrey wards. These areas are the focus of regeneration activities. The borough falls just outside the least 10% deprived in the country and ranks as the 4th most deprived in Surrey.

Homelessness trends

- The most common cause of homelessness is the loss of rented / tied accommodation due to an AST termination making up 30% of all accepted homeless households.
- The second most common cause of homelessness is parental eviction (22%) and third most common reason eviction by friends / relatives (14%).
- The main priority category during the last 5 years has been households with dependent children making up 74% of all accepted homeless applicants.
- 'Lone parents with dependent children' is the most common homeless household type totalling to 51% during the last 5 years.
- There are two common gender themes within homeless household types; a total of 95% of applicants that fell under the 'Lone parent with dependent children' category are female applicants; whereas 70% of applicants in 'One person households' are male applicants.
- The 25-44 age group is the most common age group of accepted homeless households reflecting the majority age group of the overall borough population.
- A total of 82% of accepted homeless applicants fall under the White ethnicity category largely reflecting the 90.6% White population of the borough.

Homelessness prevention

- Including non-statutory homeless households, over 850 households were prevented from becoming homeless over the last 5 years through successful advice and assistance.
- A total of 72% households were prevented from becoming homeless through assistance to obtain alternative accommodation
- 28% were able to remain in their existing home as a result of our interventions.
- The most frequently used alternative housing option is assistance into the private rented sector which forms 34% of all alternative housing options.

7. Homelessness Strategy 2017-21

Our priority objective over the next five years is to prevent homelessness and sustain tenancies. The borough has some of the highest housing costs in the country outside of London. This brings significant pressure on residents and local workers, which in turn puts pressure on our housing and homelessness service. We will continue to use a variety of tools to prevent homelessness and accept this will be a challenge in the face of increasing rental costs and welfare reform.

There is a strong corporate commitment to tackling the causes of homelessness and directing resources to tackle them. The Housing Service is now in a good position to respond to the challenges and deliver a service that makes a positive difference to those facing housing difficulty.

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8. Objective 1: Prevent homelessness and sustain tenancies

The Council is committed to providing an effective homelessness service in which prevention is the priority. Our aim is to prevent homelessness by giving advice and assistance at the earliest sign of housing insecurity, providing support to sustain tenancies and referring to specialist schemes and services.

Homelessness from the private rented sector is increasing. The borough has a buoyant private rented market in which there is no shortage of potential tenants and this means it is a challenge to secure lower cost private rented accommodation. We work with clients and our partners to source accommodation in and out of the borough and to sustain these tenancies.

We use a variety of tools to avoid homelessness. Following a review of the Housing Service and the Diagnostic Peer Review of the homelessness service we have begun to implement a number of changes to our team structure and service operation to strengthen our homeless response. More resources will be directed to tenancy sustainment activities and the homelessness prevention activities that make the most difference.

The Council's Customer Service Team is now the first point of contact for queries about housing register applications and general housing queries. This has enabled the growth of our tenancy sustainment services. Over the next year we will be able to offer more households tenancy sustainment support and will aim to intervene at an earlier stage of housing difficulty for more households.

Priority 1: Provide a housing options prevention service to all clients

Any household in need of housing advice is able to access the Housing Advice Self-Help Tool. This on-line tool, which provides information about housing options, is available anytime. Advice is given on a number of housing topics together with contact details of specialist organisations and services. A written summary of advice is produced for each user and can be accessed outside of office hours. Information is updated regularly to ensure it remains relevant. Alongside the Tool is a series of quick access on-line housing fact sheets on the most common housing queries.

We provide a great deal of telephone advice and resources mean we are unable to confirm telephone advice in writing, although we do send information as appropriate and direct clients to on-line resources. All clients who attend a Housing Options appointment are given written advice following it.

We recognise it is important to capture the volume and nature of telephone queries and have reviewed our practices to record basic details of all contact via phone or email on a customer service database. This means we can record more accurately the volume, reason for contacts and outcomes.

Homelessness prevention is at the core of our activities. Our tenancy sustainment staff and housing options officers offer advice and assistance to social housing tenants, private rented tenants and homeowners to prevent them losing their homes. Clients are assisted to avoid or resolve mortgagee debt and repossession, to exercise their rights and responsibilities as

tenants and to avoid legal and illegal eviction. Our team is able to offer assistance with court hearings to prevent homelessness.

Money management problems are a recurring theme among the households seeking housing advice. An increasing proportion of households have inadequate budgeting skills, have taken on loans and credit that they cannot sustain and as a result either fail to pay rent or consider their housing unaffordable. Our Tenancy Sustainment and Housing Options services identifying money problems and work with clients to find a way forward to prevent homelessness. Referrals are also made to Community Debt Advice (CDA), a local money service. CDA works intensively with households to manage debt and importantly develop essential budgeting skills. Households are also referred to the Citizen Advice Bureau money advice service.

Money advice is an area in which we intend to develop more expertise so we can offer a more comprehensive service to clients. We have already begun targeting young people and have piloted a homelessness advice and budgeting workshop at YMCA. The workshop is very informal and aims to provide practical advice about how to manage budgets and tenancies. We also intend to use social media to promote positive messages about the benefits of getting smart about money management.

We also recognise that every tenancy has two parties. Many of our private landlords are inexperienced, owning a single property and need support. We also offer advice to landlords and through mediation and negotiation we often reach agreement on a way forward to avoid eviction, improve landlord / tenant relations and sustain the tenancy. The positive engagement of landlords has increased greatly as a result of our tenancy sustainment approach. Furthermore, the enhanced NextStep scheme will offer more advice and information to landlords and will support the Council to hold bi-annual landlord forums.

Strategic Actions:

- Improve the functionality, take up and effectiveness of the Housing Options Self-Help Tool
- Explore opportunities to have a dedicated money advice service
- Undertake a targeted financial awareness campaign through social media channels to raise awareness of financial responsibility, budgeting skills and help services
- Set up a Homeless Forum to strengthen information sharing, dialogue and partnership working with a range of organisations providing services to our clients

Priority 2: Ensure clients are referred to support services to get into housing or sustain their current housing

Many of the households we work with have support needs, others need assistance getting basic household items or food. We are able to refer to schemes that provide support with living skills and to schemes providing practical assistance.

Households in need of furniture and other household goods are referred to Furnistore a local charity. Furnistore has a range of furniture items and white goods available. We also refer

families with young children to the East Surrey based charity Stripey Stork for assistance with equipment and clothing for babies and young children.

The Local Assistance Scheme is available in an emergency situation and can help with one or more of a range of things such as essential furniture and / or white goods, emergency travel costs, keeping the family safe and food. Three foodbanks operate locally, St Matthew's in Redhill, Methodist Church in Horley and Loveworks in Merstham, households are referred to them by the Council and other agencies including the Housing Options Team and the Family Support Team.

The East Surrey Family Support Service has been developed to provide a holistic service to 'troubled families' with a history of anti-social behaviour, worklessness and poor school attendance. The South East Surrey Team supports households in this borough, Tandridge and Mole Valley and is co-located with Housing Services. The Support Team works with a range of agencies from the statutory and voluntary sector to help families combat unemployment, poor school attendance, financial barriers and anti-social behaviour. It aims to break the cycle for future generations. Housing issues frequently arise and the Support Team works closely with Housing Services to support households facing housing insecurity, to prevent homelessness and sustain the tenancy.

Housing Services works closely with a number of partner organisations who can provide tenancy support to households in difficulty. Referrals are made to Parashoot, a Raven Housing Trust and Prospect Housing operated tenancy support service. Parashoot is available to single people, couples and families from all communities including people with mental health, alcohol or drug problems regardless of their tenure. The service supports people at risk of losing their home or who are homeless and need somewhere to live. Parashoot has assisted many households referred by the Council to prevent homelessness.

A number of households seeking assistance need accommodation based support. We make referrals to a range of supported housing providers in the borough and work in partnership to offer a joined up service. YMCA East Surrey provides accommodation to young people in housing difficulty. We refer single people to the YMCA for assistance and have supported the development of move on accommodation. We also refer single women to Wayside which offers accommodation and support to homeless young women. Single people with more complex support needs are referred to Transform Housing & Support. Transform is able to provide dedicated support and / or accommodation to people with mental health, drug, alcohol or offending issues with the aim of assisting people to live more independently.

We are mindful of the challenges facing supported housing providers in the face of reduced Housing Related Support Grant from Surrey County Council and uncertainty regarding the potential cap on housing costs. The services they provide are often the only housing option for individuals with more challenging issues. We are committed to working with providers to identify the service impacts of loss of rental income and how we can assist them.

Operating alongside these direct services is a network of multi-agency meetings where support for individuals and the community are coordinated. These include MARAC meetings for victims of domestic abuse; PPO meetings for priority prolific offenders and the monthly Community Incident Action Group (CIAG). These meetings are attended by a range of organisations that include Raven Housing Trust, the Council, the Police, Adult Social Care,

Children's Services, Community Mental Health Recovery Service and Surrey Alcohol and Drug Advisory Service. These meetings are well attended and have led to a strong coordinated multi-agency approach to resolving issues that avoids duplication.

Strategic action:

- Work with partners to identify and support the most vulnerable clients to prevent homelessness
- Work with supported housing providers to manage the impacts of reduced Housing Related Support Grant and potential changes to cap housing benefits
- Establish a supported housing referral panel to assess potential clients needs and jointly agree a housing pathway

Priority 3: Ensure victims of domestic abuse are referred to support services and given timely advice and assistance

Homelessness caused by fleeing a violent relationship (from a partner or associated person) accounted for 10% of all accepted homeless applicants during the period 2011-2016. The number of calls received by Housing Services regarding domestic abuse has increased. We provide practical advice and assistance to victims based on their situation. East Surrey Domestic Abuse Service (ESDAS) can assist with obtaining Non-Molestation Orders, Occupation Orders as well as referring to the Sanctuary Scheme. We will contact Housing Providers where a victim is a social housing tenant and discuss options for an emergency move.

In situations where a client wishes to leave the area we will assist with sourcing refuge placements on behalf of victims and give contact details for the 24 hour National Domestic Abuse Helpline and/or National Centre for Domestic Abuse (NCDV). We also have comprehensive information in the Housing Options Toolkit and a housing fact sheet. We work closely with Women's Aid and recently worked on a successful joint bid to secure additional resources from the Department for Communities and Local Government to provide additional accommodation. In some situations we are able to refer to the Sanctuary Scheme which, following a risk assessment, installs security measures. In the last year we have improved the recording of data on this group and now record refuge placements and enquiries to gain a better understanding of this issue.

Strategic Action:

- Monitor the number of enquiries from victims of domestic abuse, ensure housing service staff are trained to recognise and respond appropriately to victims

Priority 4: Provide support and assistance to single homeless people

Support is available to single homeless people through a small network of organisations. Renewed Hope Trust operates a Drop-In service to people who are homeless, lonely or disadvantaged. The scheme operates three days in the summer and five days in the winter offering a lunch meal, Foodbank tokens, an advocacy service, support and services in partnership with a number of organisations, as well as work experience for ex-offenders.

East Surrey Outreach Service (eSOS) works with street homeless people to offer advice and support, referrals to other agencies and re-connection with friends, family and the area they

left. Operated in partnership with Mole Valley, Epsom & Ewell and Tandridge Councils and Stoneham Housing Association the scheme is based on the No Second Night Out principles.

A winter night shelter for the street homeless is operated by Renewed Hope Trust. Moving between different venues it is operated by volunteers and supported financially by local churches, individuals, the Council and Tandridge District Council. The Shelter provides transport to the venue, a hot meal, clothing and personal hygiene kits, a bed for the night in a safe and friendly environment and signposting to other support services. The operation of the shelter relies on donated venues. Renewed Hope Trust continues to search for a premise that can offer a permanent base for the shelter and associated services.

YMCA East Surrey and Wayside continue to provide supported housing to young homeless people. Older single people are referred to other services such as Transform Housing. We also refer single people to Vision Housing who can source private rented accommodation outside of the borough. All single homeless household are made a minimum offer of £500 towards securing private rented accommodation.

Strategic Action:

- Secure further resources to enable the No Second Night Out local scheme eSOS scheme to continue to operate across East Surrey
- Investigate the options for securing a more permanent direct access hostel for homeless people.

9. Objective 2: Increase the supply of private rented accommodation available to people at risk of homelessness

The availability of private rented sector housing is crucial to managing demand and preventing homelessness. It can offer a flexible housing option for households who cannot afford to buy a home, need a quick housing solution, or face a long wait for an offer of social housing. The Council's use of out of borough homeless emergency accommodation for homeless households has increased in recent years and is not sustainable in the longer term for the Council or the households placed.

Over the next few years we need to increase our access to the private rented sector. This will be a challenge given the demand for private rented housing, rising rents, fixed local housing allowance rates and changes to the taxation of private landlords. We currently support the YMCA East Surrey NextStep Rent Deposit Scheme to assist families at risk of homelessness or homeless to access private rented accommodation. NextStep assists around 50 households per year to secure homes, they also advise and assist a number of other households and maintain a portfolio of tenancies each year. This is a successful scheme and we are committed to building on its success by enhancing and expanding the scheme.

Single people also face challenges to secure private rented accommodation. Within the borough there are only 23 Registered Houses in Multiple Occupation. We are aware anecdotally a much larger number of properties are rented on a room share basis, these units are not subject to regulation. We are able to offer £500 towards securing private rented accommodation for single people or couples. Single young people aged under 35 in the private rented sector seeking housing benefit or applying for universal credit are restricted to the shared room rate of benefit. Finding suitable and available accommodation is a challenge for some single people.

Finding a suitable private rented home is only part of the challenge for the households we assist, many have difficulty securing the deposit and rent in advance and increasingly letting agents and landlords require guarantors where household income is below a specified level. We need initiatives and resources to assist households into private rented housing where the only barrier is the initial tenancy set up cost.

Priority 1: Improve access to suitable private rented accommodation for households at risk of homelessness or experiencing homelessness

A key priority for the Council's Housing Service is to expand and enhance the existing NextStep rent deposit scheme to achieve a reduction in B&B expenditure and increase the number of homeless prevention outcomes. The existing NextStep Scheme secures around 50 tenancies a year. The enhanced scheme will be piloted for 18 months and will aim to double the number of households assisted into private rented housing.

The enhanced NextStep scheme includes an enhanced offer to tenants and new offer to landlords. Tenants will be offered greater assistance to find suitable accommodation by a new staff member dedicated to sourcing properties. The location of properties will extend to outside the borough so that a range of affordable homes can be secured. This will also

contribute to helping households take advantage of employment opportunities elsewhere. Tenants will be offered more tenancy support with the aim of sustaining tenancies for longer. Support will link closely with the activities the Council and our partners are undertaking to manage the impacts of welfare reform. Some tenants will also benefit from a more attractive tenancy bond which will remove the upfront cost of providing a cash deposit.

The enhanced NextStep scheme also aims to attract more landlords to the service and will undertake an advertising campaign to attract them from a wider geographical area. NextStep already offers free tenant introductions, photographic inventories and tenancy support to tenants and landlords. The new scheme will enable landlords to benefit from additional support provided to tenants by reducing tenancy breakdowns. The scheme will also be able to offer landlords a wider range of options for tenancy deposits and bonds, including three month cash deposits or lifetime bonds if appropriate. The promotion of good practice and advice will be offered to landlords on a range of matters through bi-annual landlord forums.

Currently, the Council is able to offer financial assistance towards deposits, rent in advance and has piloted a rent guarantor scheme to prevent homelessness. Housing Services works closely with the Benefits Team to maximise the use of Discretionary Housing Payments (DHP) for rent in advance, deposits, assisting households subject to the Total Benefit Cap, bedroom tax cases and providing 'top ups' to households with rents above the Local Housing Allowance rate. Housing Services also provides financial assistance through loans and grants towards deposits and rent in advance from its Repossession Prevention Fund. This Fund is limited and relies on the repayment of loans and deposits. NextStep is able to offer support to households who manage to find a property but need assistance with setting up the tenancy. NextStep offers assistance with DHP applications, applications, benefit applications and signing up of the tenancy. This helps to smooth the tenancy process, builds our client's confidence and connects landlords to the NextStep service.

At the end of 2014 a pilot Rent Guarantor Scheme was set up. Aimed at financially low risk households facing homelessness, the scheme enables the Council to agree to act as a rent guarantor. It assisted five households in 2015 and a further four households in 2016. The scheme is monitored by the Tenancy Sustainment Officer who provides advice to households to maintain their tenancies.

Strategic Action:

- Operate an 18 month enhanced NextStep Rent Deposit Scheme pilot to secure an additional 75 new private sector tenancies.
- Secure continued funding of the Repossession Prevention Fund and implement mechanisms to ensure recovery of loans to enable the funds to be recycled to assist more households.
- Continue to operate the Rent Guarantor Scheme for suitable households at risk of homelessness and share good practice with other Councils.

10. Objective 3: Work in partnership to minimise the impact of welfare reform on our residents and improve access to employment opportunities for people in housing need and at risk of homelessness

The government is continuing its programme of welfare reform as part of its deficit reduction strategy. Changes arising out of the programme have impacted on the ability of some our borough residents to meet their housing costs and will continue to do so. The most significant reform has been the Total Benefit Cap. This two stage reduction affected a relatively small group of residents in the first round and will affect a larger group of households in the second round with an even greater impact on their ability to meet housing costs.

The Council has put in place a Welfare Reform working group working intensively with affected households. Our focus is on maximising income, managing money and helping people find employment and signposting to agencies able to assist with employment advice. The emphasis of advice is on employment because this is the most sustainable way for households manage the impacts of welfare reform.

The welfare benefits system continues to be subject to change and we need to work with borough residents and partner agencies to minimise the impact of changes on households who will be impacted by welfare reform. The impacts and solutions vary depending on the individual circumstances of households and we need to ensure we take a flexible and responsive approach to different households.

Priority 1: Deliver a multi-agency support service to assist residents affected by welfare reform to prevent homelessness.

The Council's housing benefit team is proactively contacting households significantly affected by welfare reform. Households are visited and offered advice and information to understand the impacts on their household, how to maximise their household income and the benefits of getting into employment to mitigate the impacts of welfare changes. The aim of our approach is to:

- Mitigate the worst effects of welfare reform
- Improve pathways to jobs for families and young unemployed people
- Provide information about childcare options to help tackle affordability and enable parents to take up employment
- Work with local employers to identify work ready individuals for new and expanding businesses
- Work with partners such Community Debt Advice, Citizens Advice Bureau and Raven HT to offer money management and debt advice

The Council assisted 36 households affected by the Total Benefit Cap in phase 1 through assistance into employment, ensuring they accessed all appropriate benefits, providing budgeting advice and signposting to partner agencies providing money and employment advice. The revised Total Benefit Cap which came into effect in November 2016 affects 182

households and has left more households with a significant shortfall between their income and housing costs.

Working in partnership with the DWP and Raven Housing Trust the Council has contacted all affected households to offer advice, information and practical assistance. This has resulted in some households increasing their working hours to exempt them from the Benefit Cap, other non-working households are preparing for employment. Income maximisation is an important aspect of our advice including ensuring lone parents apply for child maintenance payments from absent parents. For many affected households securing childcare remains an issue. We have prepared advice packs and information on how to find suitable childcare. The local jobcentre working in partnership with the Council and has assigned three Jobcentre coaches to work with households in the borough affected by the Benefit Cap.

It will be a significant challenge to deliver a high volume of positive outcomes for welfare reform affected households in the context of a further reduction in the benefit cap, the roll out of full Universal Credit and other welfare reforms. We remain committed to assisting households to manage the impacts of welfare reform and manage their housing costs.

Strategic Actions:

- Identify resources to continue interventions that prevent homelessness linked to welfare reform
- Minimise homelessness arising from welfare reform

Priority 2: Work in partnership to maximise access to employment and prevent homelessness

Our experience shows a direct link between unemployment and risk of homelessness. Research by Raven Housing Trust has found that over 80 per cent of homeless household families housed by them are unemployed or economically inactive. Welfare reform is having a significant impact on families who are economically inactive and will place those most affected by changes in their income at risk of homelessness. The borough is an area of high employment. The task will be to help households overcome barriers to employment and support those entering employment.

The East Surrey Pathway to Employment project aims to target people facing housing insecurity to move closer to the job market or into work. It is a multi-agency project that will provide intensive, targeted, wrap-around support on an individual basis.

All project beneficiaries will have to be facing housing insecurity such as living in temporary accommodation, been served a repossession notice or be fleeing / or have had to flee domestic abuse. Raven's experience and research has identified a high percentage of homeless families housed are not in work, are likely to have chaotic lifestyles and experience a number barriers or perceived barriers to getting into employment.

The project will offer a programme of individually tailored support from building self-confidence to CV writing, interview skills and in-work support. The project covers East Surrey and North Sussex and supports people located in pockets of deprivation including Redhill West and Merstham. The project aims are two-fold. Firstly, to increase the numbers

of people with multiple barriers to employment moving into active job searching and entering the workplace by addressing the basic skills deficit of the unemployed / inactive people. The second aim is to help local employers who need to grow their businesses in a high employment area but can't recruit.

In 2016 the project engaged Sainsbury's Redhill to offer 100 jobs in their expanded supermarket. The project offers free support and training to get 'work ready' and open day events.

Growing new businesses

The Council has a strong commitment to supporting local business and encouraging a vibrant local economy. It operates schemes to assist people to set up their own small businesses. Many of the schemes are aimed at people who are unemployed but are closer to work than the households targeted by the Pathways to Employment project. The aim is to help people turn their ideas into reality by offering practical advice and information about setting up a business. Our experience shows that housing security is linked to employment. The Business Engagement Team aims to help people make the transition into successful self employment.

Working in partnership with the Jobcentre the 'Let's do Business' programme offers interested people referred by the Jobcentre a two day training course about how to set up a business. It gives practical advice and support on all aspects of setting up a business including how to produce a business plan, marketing, finance and offers mentoring.

The Council also runs an annual 'Entrepreneur Academy' with East Surrey College. The academy provides an opportunity for interested parties to gain the skills needed to set up a business, including business planning, finance, marketing, legal information and online business promotion. It is free to attend and runs once a month for 6 months each year. Students get the opportunity to enter a 'Dragon's Den' style competition and win £5,000 to help get their business up and running. The academy has run for four years and a number of students have gone on to launch successful businesses.

As well as training, the Council also offers Business Support Grants of up to £1,000 to people setting up or looking to grow small businesses. Match funded grants have been provided to a range of small businesses such as window cleaners, mobile spray tanning salons and other grass roots businesses.

Monthly free Learning Lunches are held at the Town Hall. They give the opportunity to hear an informative speaker and the opportunity to network. Topics include Social Media Facebook for Business, Mystery Shopping, branding, 'must read' newsletters writing.

Strategic Actions:

- Provide support to deliver the Pathway to Employment project to assist households in housing insecurity get closer to work and prevent homelessness
- Work with partners to provide support to assist unemployed people to develop their business ideas and move into paid work and prevent homelessness

Priority 3: Prepare for the implementation of Universal Credit, working with partners to develop support for affected vulnerable residents

We have already taken a number of measures to assist households affected by welfare reform. Under Universal Credit, which is subject to a national roll out programme due to be fully implemented in 2022, working age households receive a single monthly payment directly from the DWP. This single payment will include an element for housing costs. Households are expected to pay their landlord rent from this single payment. This is a significant change for many social housing tenant claimants as previously housing benefit was paid direct to their landlord. Payments will only be made direct to landlords in situations where households are categorised as vulnerable and / or where a household has fallen into 8 weeks arrears.

There are a number of concerns about some household's ability to manage a large single monthly payment, budget and prioritise bills and living expenses. There is also the potential for increased rent arrears and ultimately more homelessness. Direct payments to landlords can be activated through application to the DWP when a household has reached 8 weeks of arrears. Our concern is that this level of arrears marks the point at which many landlords would issue a Notice of Seeking Possession.

Initiatives to assist households to manage money, deal with debt and budget effectively will have an important role in the prevention of homelessness. The voluntary sector currently provides welfare benefits advice and debt management assistance. These services receive a high volume of referrals from the Council and other agencies and are likely to face increasing pressure as the impacts of welfare reform and universal credit accumulate.

Social landlords are responding to the pressures upon household's incomes brought by welfare reform in a number of ways. Many have set up money advice and housing support initiatives offering advice and practical assistance to tenants facing financial difficulties. Social landlords routinely undertake affordability assessments of households being offered a tenancy. Increasingly social landlords are requesting rent in advance and this varies from a payment of a week to a month. More homes offered by social landlords are set at affordable rent levels and typically the rents are unaffordable to unemployed / economically active households subject to the Total Benefit Cap.

Strategic Aims:

- Housing services to participate in the development of Local Support Service arrangements for implementation of Universal Credit to minimise the risk of homelessness arising from benefit change.
- Identify resources to deliver more money advice services in partnership with voluntary sector and other local partners

11. Objective 4: Reduce the use of bed and breakfast accommodation

This is a significant challenge. We have an increasing number of households approaching as homeless or threatened with homelessness. Legislation is clear that households with children should not be placed in non self-contained bed & breakfast (B&B) accommodation for longer than six weeks. We have been placing homeless households in self-contained emergency accommodation outside of the borough for a number of years. However, this is not economically or socially sustainable.

Legislation allows Council's to discharge a homeless duty to a household into the private rented sector. To date we have made little progress using this power, although we intend to exercise it more frequently in the future. To avoid the use of self-contained B&Bs we have invested £1.4 million of affordable housing planning contributions in properties in the borough. The Council has brought into use eight homes as temporary accommodation. Our aim is to increase the number of temporary accommodation units in the borough over the next two years and reduce our expenditure on private B&B accommodation.

As well as providing temporary accommodation, we need to ensure that other tenures are available. NextStep already operates a private rental deposit scheme which we will enhance further to offer more tenancies. A supply of affordable rented housing also needs to be maintained to meet the growing demand for housing in the borough. The Council has committed through the Core Strategy to deliver an additional 100 affordable housing units per year over the next 15 years. A steady stream of new build affordable housing is provided in the borough by housing association partners and the target is being achieved.

The largest supply of affordable rented housing comes from vacancies in the existing housing stock. This is an important resource for managing the pressures of homelessness. The Council has responded to the powers given to local authorities by the Localism Act 2011 to set local defined housing register policies. The Council has reviewed the Housing Register & Allocation Policy twice since the Act. More recently the 2015 review amended the local connection priority, reviewed priority bands, and community contribution rules. In recognition of the increased use of private rented accommodation, the bands were reviewed to allow private rented tenants to join the register where a tenancy was held for under four years.

Priority 1: Assist homeless households owed a re-housing duty into suitable private rented accommodation

The Localism Act 2013 introduced a new power to enable local authorities to discharge the homeless duty by the offer of suitable private rented accommodation, rather than social housing. This aims to give local authorities more flexibility in responding to homelessness and to reduce the time spent and costs of providing temporary accommodation. However, the power is only effective if there is a supply of suitable private rented accommodation and the Council has made very limited use of this power.

A priority for the Housing Service is for the enhanced NextStep Rent Deposit Scheme to attract more landlords and increase homeless prevention through a greater supply of private rented accommodation. One aspect of this service will be securing homes into which the

Council can discharge the homelessness duty. We accept that this is not appropriate for every homeless household. We will work closely with NextStep to exercise this power effectively. NextStep will also work closely with the Council's Environmental Health Team to improve standards in private sector housing.

Strategic Action:

- Work in partnership with NextStep to discharge the Council's homelessness duty into suitable private rented accommodation.

Priority 2: Provide more temporary accommodation in the borough to reduce the use of out of borough placements

Use of out of borough emergency accommodation has risen sharply in the last few years. As a consequence expenditure has reached an unsustainable level. In 2016 we set a target to have no more than 25 households in B&B accommodation on a Friday night. This has been a real challenge to maintain as the numbers of households approaching us has remained high. We have purchased a small number of properties in the borough for use as temporary accommodation and these are well managed by a local social enterprise company Ethical Lettings.

Our aim is to bring our use of out of borough B&Bs to a minimum. We intend to provide temporary accommodation in the borough and aim to deliver around 25 units. The units will be managed directly by the Council. We will be able to offer a proactive management service that works closely with the Benefits Team, Welfare Reform group, Family Support Service and other agencies to prepare households for the next housing move. The acquisition of the units will be managed by the Council's Property Company and funded by affordable housing planning contributions.

Strategic Action:

- Reduce the use of out of borough emergency accommodation through the acquisition of Council owned temporary accommodation in the borough

12. Consultation

A series of consultation opportunities have taken place to inform the strategy. We have consulted staff across the organisation, our external partners and users.

This Homelessness Strategy has evolved directly from the Housing Service Review. The Service Review explored the operation of the services and future direction. A series of workshops were held with the housing team to discuss the strategic direction of the service, preventing homelessness, improving client contact and organisational efficiency. The input of team staff to the workshops and outputs have helped shape the objectives and actions in this Strategy.

Consultation workshops were held with our partners to discuss the strengths and weaknesses of the service and discuss priorities. The workshops were attended by accommodation providers and service providers. The feedback on the homelessness service was positive with our partners commenting on the good communication they had with the service, the quality of referrals to their services enabling quick informed decisions, the proactive use of the DHP Fund, the guarantor scheme and rent in advance have been positive schemes. Overall the work the housing service undertakes on accessing private rented accommodation is helpful to their clients.

13. Financing and Resourcing the Strategy and Action Plan

All roles in the team contribute to the homelessness service so it is not possible to provide a definite cost for the homelessness service alone so a housing service level budget approach is applied.

The cost of providing RBBC's housing service has risen in recent years. The 2015/16 annual budget was set at £673,000. The actual expenditure was £1,081,00. Net spend of £569,000 on emergency bed and breakfast accommodation was linked to just over half of this overspend. The budget has been re-sized for 2016/17 to £926,000 which is a realistic budget that reflects the increased pressures from homelessness households but is still challenging and is linked to the implementation of a range of initiatives aimed at reducing homelessness. The budget will be reviewed annually, with the aim to reduce it once the strategic actions are operational. Additional budget has been agreed to trial an enhanced rent deposit bond scheme for 18 months and to deliver the eSOS service until March 2017.

One of the initiatives aimed at reducing B&B expenditure is the development of Council owned temporary accommodation in the borough. This will reduce reliance on expensive out of borough B&B accommodation. The capital costs of the temporary accommodation will be met by affordable housing planning contributions.

The Service has access to two grant funds used to prevent homelessness. The housing service continues to make use of around £70,000 of the £140,000 Discretionary Housing

Payment (DHP) fund to assist households at risk of homelessness. DHP is used for rent deposits, rent in advance and bridging affordability gaps.

Some years ago the Council received two single grant payments for homelessness prevention work. The Council ring fenced this grant into the Repossession Prevention Fund (RPF). In 2015/16 the use of £28,000 prevented 25 households from becoming homeless. The Fund is used to pay for rent in advance, deposits and rent arrears when the DHP cannot be used. The Fund has also been used to clear gardens and rubbish to avoid homelessness. Rent deposits are repaid back to the fund so a proportion of the Fund is recycled. In September 2016 the fund ran out and was increased by £20,000 from the Corporate Plan Delivery Fund. In recognition of the valuable contribution that the RPF makes to prevent homelessness, the Council has committed an annual contribution to the RPF from the Corporate Plan Delivery Fund.

The housing service also contributes funding to other organisations that provide homelessness prevention services. The Council funds the NextStep Rent Deposit Scheme £64,000 annually. A £3,000 contribution is made to East Surrey Domestic Abuse Service for the Sanctuary Scheme. A contribution of £2,000 is also made to Renewed Hope Trust towards the Winter Night Shelter.

Staffing resources were reviewed in 2016/17 following the Housing Services Review. The staffing structure has changed and is better able to respond to the homelessness challenges facing the borough. A Housing Services Manager is now in place, a Tenancy Sustainment & Housing Register Team Leader has been appointed and an additional tenancy sustainment worker has been appointed.

14. Reviewing the Strategy

The Homelessness Strategy will be reviewed annually to assess our progress in meeting the identified actions. The Review will highlight any changes in priorities, reasons and any new actions. The social housing sector is facing unprecedented change and we must be flexible enough to be able to respond by shifting our focus and resources as required.