

# Homelessness Strategy 2017–21

## Action Plan Review: Summary December 2019

This summary should be read alongside the original Action Plan published in 2017

### Objective 1: Prevent homelessness and sustain tenancies

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

##### 1.1 – Improve the functionality, take up and effectiveness of the Housing Options Self-Help Tool **ACTION UPDATED**

The decision was made to remove the Housing Advice Self Self-Help Tool from our website and replace it with a range of online factsheets. The Tool was underused because it was complex for users to navigate, inflexible and incompatible with mobile devices and tablets.

In its place, we created the ‘Common Housing Problems’ webpage on the Council website. This contains a set of downloadable PDF factsheets covering a wide range of housing related issues. This accessible and printable information is appropriate for the public, RBBC staff and local partners & agencies.

##### 1.2 - Explore opportunities to have a dedicated money advice service **ACTION UPDATED**

We successfully established an in-house Money Support Team in October 2018. This team consists of 2 dedicated officers managed under the Wellbeing & Intervention Team and is funded by the Housing Team. The contract for the team is currently for 2 years, with the hope it will continue to operate thereafter.

The Service is run on a referral basis (Council in-house referrals only) and works with households to help them save money, avoid or reduce debt, budget and maximise incomes. They also offer support clients moving onto Universal Credit. Clients with high-level and/or complex debt issues can be referred to Community Debt Advice. Demand for this service has been high with each Money Support Advisor working with 12 cases.

##### 1.3 - Undertake a targeted financial awareness campaign through social media channels to raise awareness of financial responsibility, budgeting skills and help services **ACTION RETAINED**

This has not been delivered yet as introduction of the Homelessness Reduction Act took priority. We now aim to work alongside the newly established Money Support Team and our Communications Team to begin financial-awareness campaigns on the Council Facebook and Twitter pages.

##### 1.4 – Set up a Homeless Forum to strengthen information sharing, dialogue and partnership working with a range of organisations providing services to our clients **ACTION REMOVED**

The Forum was set up and one has been delivered, which was well attended and well received by partner agencies, although it was noted that input from stakeholders was limited. Since the introduction of the Homelessness Reduction Act, individual meetings have been held with statutory agencies and many housing providers to inform them about changes to our prevention and relief processes and to strengthen partnership working to improve

positive outcomes for clients.

This action has been removed as it was not the most effective way to engage. Other existing forums and meetings provide opportunities to engage with partners alongside good partnership working through the 'day job'.

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

### **1.5 – Work with partners to identify and support the most vulnerable clients to prevent homelessness ACTION UPDATED**

Although supported housing assessment meetings were not established (please see 1.7 for details), several other activities have taken place:

- Housing staff delivered a series of workshops to Wayside Hostel and the YMCA. Wayside residents were given advice on maximising the support offered in their current placement in preparation for move on accommodation and were advised about the housing options available. This workshop was held twice with almost all residents attending receiving positive feedback. Workshops to YMCA residents in the last 6 months of their stay, gave advice on moving on options and income/budgeting.
- The Council introduced 2 new roles which offer intensive one-to-one support for clients. An Accommodation Officer manages the Council's new Emergency Accommodation unit and 7 Temporary Accommodation units. This role is funded by the income generated from the units. A Housing Support Coordinator role, funded by the Homelessness Support Grant, provides intensive support to vulnerable clients being assisted by the Housing Service. The flexibility of this role has led to many positive outcomes for high need clients often when other interventions have failed.
- Housing staff also worked with Renewed Hope Trust to meet homeless clients with high support needs to offer advice.

### **1.6 – Work with supported housing providers to manage the impacts of reduced Housing Related Support Grant and changes to cap housing benefits – ACTION REMOVED**

Several activities took place:

- Local supported housing providers managed their budgets in response to the reduction of housing related support
- Raven Housing Trust communicated with sheltered accommodation tenants about the cuts in support services. They also worked with Surrey County Council to identify tenants who would benefit from an Adult Social Care assessment and potential qualification for support under the Care Act eligibility criteria.
- After increasing national concerns, the planned introduction of Local Housing Allowance caps for social housing was halted.

No further action is required and has been removed from the new action plan.

### **1.7 – Establish a supported housing referral panel to access potential clients needs and jointly agree a housing pathway - ACTION REMOVED**

The panel was trialled but attendance was low, which increased pressure on agencies who did attend. Instead, the Council has found other ways to approach this without the need for a panel:

- A personalised pathway plan is now created for each individual client under the Prevention or Relief Duty including referrals to supported housing
- We have started to create a database of supported housing providers to maximise availability for our vulnerable clients.

- Our Housing Needs Manager regularly meets with supported housing providers to discuss issues, share information and maintain communication
- Our Housing Support Coordinator is in regular contact with local and national supported housing providers, which has helped establish links with new providers.

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

#### **1.8 – Monitor the number of enquiries from victims of domestic abuse, ensure housing service staff are trained to recognise and respond appropriately to victims** **ACTION RETAINED**

Analysis of enquiries showed in 2017-18, there were a total of 495 housing options approaches of which 73 households were threatened with homelessness due to domestic abuse (DA). Furthermore, of the total 128 housing register applications made, 24 households stated they were homeless due to DA. These statistics include all contact made with the Housing Service.

Under the new Homelessness Reduction Act, the first 3 quarters of 2018-19 show 8 out of 226 prevention cases were threatened with homelessness due to DA. Figures also show that 60 out of 137 relief cases were homeless due to DA (this includes the 8 prevention cases). These statistics do not include all contact made with Housing Services, we aim to record this data at the start of 2019-20. Current figures reflect that over 40% of cases have been due to DA.

In partnership with the local Women's Aid refuge, a successful bid was also made for the Government's top-up fund for '*Specialist accommodation-based support and service reform to meet the priorities for Domestic Abuse services: additional support*'. This bid supports builds on another successful bid to provide a specialist Asian women's support worker and an additional bed space suitable for disabled households. The BME element of the project has assisted 14 women and 20 children as well as offering a wider spectrum of support than originally anticipated.

Housing Services attends Reigate and Banstead Women's Aid team meetings and works with East Surrey Domestic Abuse Service. The Council took part in the White Ribbon campaign.

### **Priority 4: Provide support and assistance to single homeless people**

#### **1.11 – Secure further resources to enable the No Second Night Out local scheme eSOS to take on the No First Night Out approach and continue to operate across East Surrey** **ACTION RETAINED**

eSOS is now funded directly by the four East Surrey Local Authorities (RBBC, MVDC, E&E, and TDC). During 2018/19, eSOS worked with 249 individuals across the four local authority areas and successfully housed 96 clients into supported, private and social housing.

In May 2019, Thames Reach took over the eSOS contract. The Council also secured a successful bid through the MHCLG Rapid Rehousing Pathways (RRP) funding round. The grant funded a full time Navigator role working with high level complex needs clients. The grant also includes an allowance of £10,000 to be used for rent in advance, factors which prevent securing accommodation and any other relevant payment, with a maximum limit of £500 per client.

### **1.12 – Investigate the options for securing a more permanent direct access hostel for homeless people ACTION UPDATED**

This action has changed into a commitment to deliver supported housing for single people with complex needs. Recent analysis shows an increasing number of single homeless people with complex needs (drug, alcohol, mental health, ex-prisoners) which needing more intensive support which is not easily available in the borough.

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

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

#### **2.1 – Operate an 18 month enhanced NextStep Rent Deposit Pilot Scheme ACTION UPDATED**

The 18-month pilot period ended in June 2018. The enhanced scheme aimed to provide an extra 50 tenancies per year compared to the original target of 40 tenancies, creating a total target of 135 during the 18-month period. During the pilot, this scheme has:

- Received 643 referrals
- Interviewed 452 households
- Prevented 54 households from homelessness
- Allowed 190 households to be helped into ASTs
- Allowed 148 households to receive a DHP, RBBC grant, Homelessness Prevention Scheme Loan for rent in advance/deposit
- Used 53 guaranteed bonds instead of deposits
- Spent a total of £240,305 on rent in advance & deposits

The success of this scheme has allowed the Council to decide to extend it indefinitely with funding from the Homelessness Support Grant

#### **2.2 Secure continued funding of the Repossession Prevention Scheme and implement recovery measures such as interest free loans to enable the money provided through the fund to be recycled to assist more households ACTION UPDATED**

The Homelessness Loan Prevention Scheme was established (HPLS). The HPLS, funded by the Repossession Prevention Fund, offers an interest-free loan to households who are homeless or in housing difficulty to help prevent or relieve it. Repayment of loans enables money to be recycled to help further households at risk of homelessness and supports the continuation of the scheme. The scheme is available to households meeting eligibility criteria and can only operate when enough funds are available. It replaces the previous Single Persons Rent Deposit Scheme allowing us to help a wider range of households.

#### **2.3 – Continue to operate the Rent Guarantor Scheme for suitable households at risk of homelessness and share good practice with other Councils ACTION RETAINED**

Since 2017, 27 households have been assisted through this scheme.

In June 2019 revised procedures and limitations on the Council's financial liability were introduced. RBBC is the only Surrey local authority operating a guarantor scheme and has shared good practice with Surrey authorities.

## **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**

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

#### **3.1 – Work in partnership to minimise homelessness arising from welfare reform through the provision of on-going advice and support to affected households **ACTION RETAINED****

This action is reviewed in 2 parts: external and internal partnership working.

##### External:

- The partnership Working Agreement was replaced by 'duty to refer' in October 2018.
- Training and presentations have been delivered to specified and relevant agencies
- The Council has worked with providers of education and training to create courses and information sessions to improve digital skills
- Partnership protocols on how to assist clients have been agreed with housing associations such as Raven Housing Trust
- The Housing Team has given presentations about housing and welfare reform to the DWP, Citizens Advice Bureau, supported housing providers, housing associations and to an East Surrey briefing (jointly run with our East Surrey Housing colleagues) attended by statutory agencies & third sector organisations.
- We work closely with Community Debt Advice and are producing an agreement to further strengthen partnership working with Citizens Advice.
- We prepared a communications campaign to raise awareness of credit unions and dangers of loan sharks alongside the Illegal Money Lending Team.
- We are running a forum for our frontline workers jointly with the DWP, which includes attendance from mental health services and housing associations.
- We have been supporting and educating private landlords about UC

##### Internal:

- The Council introduced a Money Support Team to assist people affected by welfare reform. They also managed DWP referrals for digital and budgeting support to the end of March 2019. The CAB offers this role post March 19.
- A cross team group has been set up offer solutions/preparations to any UC issues. An agreement has been made between Housing and Benefits to send reminders to clients who have applied to U to ensure completion of the process.
- We maximise our use of DHPs and Repossession Prevention fund to help households affected by welfare reform to stay in their homes or to assist them into new accommodation.
- Our Housing Register Allocations Policy allows households in rent arrears as a result of welfare reform to join the Register where they have a repayment plan agreed.

Our strong partnership working has made a positive impact on our ability to work together to help more households resolve their housing difficulties

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

#### **3.2 – Provide support to deliver the Pathway to Employment project to assist households in housing insecurity get closer to work and prevent homelessness**

### **ACTION REMOVED**

The decision to remove this from our Action Plan was made due to the steep decline in referrals being made to this scheme by the Council. Unfortunately, the referral process was complex and referral criteria too restrictive. The scheme remains in place and is available to clients but it will cease to become a priority for this Homelessness Strategy. Housing staff will signpost clients to employment information.

### **3.3 – Work with partners to provide support to assist unemployed people to develop their business ideas and move into paid work and prevent homelessness**

#### **ACTION REMOVED**

During 2017-18, the Council gave £50,000 in grants to support new and growing businesses. An entrepreneurs' academy was also run where entrepreneurial businesses could potentially win £5,000 business funding. Furthermore, a workshop was held with the DWP and local businesses in order to get more businesses to sign up to the disability confident scheme. However, due to a decline in businesses endorsing the scheme, the workshops have now ended and consequently this has been removed from our Action Plan. Should we identify more interest in the scheme, the Council may consider its revival.

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

#### **3.4 – Housing Services to participate in the development of local arrangements for**

#### **benefit change- ACTION REMOVED**

This action has been removed as it was identified as a duplication of action 3.1 which addresses partnership working in anticipation of Universal Credit roll out.

#### **3.5 – Identify resources to deliver more money advice services in partnership with voluntary sector and other local partners – ACTION REMOVED**

This action has been removed as this was identified as a duplication of action 3.1 which addresses the Council's money advice service delivery and partnership working with Community Debt Advice.

### **Objective 4: Reduce the use of bed and breakfast accommodation**

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

#### **4.1 – Work in partnership with NextStep to discharge the Council's homelessness duty into suitable private rented accommodation – ACTION REMOVED**

This action was linked to housing legislation which has been in part replaced by the Homelessness Reduction Act (HRA). This action has been made redundant and removed from the Action Plan. Under the HRA, the Council works with NextStep (see action 2.1) to help clients into the private rented sector under prevention duties rather than as a legal discharge of homelessness duty. We are currently in the process of drafting a new private rented sector discharge and suitability policy.

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

#### **4.2 – Reduce the use of out of borough emergency accommodation through the acquisition of Council owned temporary accommodation in the borough – ACTION**

## **REMOVED**

This action has been successfully achieved and implemented; it has been removed from the Action Plan.

In March 2017, a property was purchased in Horley using affordable housing developer contributions. It was fully refurbished, extended and converted it into an 11-room emergency accommodation unit. It opened in October 2018 and has an average occupancy rate of 94%. Prior to its opening these households been placed in out-of-borough accommodation due to the shortage of local suitable accommodation. It has enabled families to remain in local services, schools, close to families and support networks and reduced spend on out of borough family placements.

## **The Homelessness Reduction Act**

The Homelessness Reduction Act (HRA) enacted in 2018, transformed the way local authorities manage homelessness applications. From Royal Assent in April 2017, RBBC has worked hard to prepare for this new and significant legislation.

The Housing Team structure and working practices have been reviewed to manage the introduction of the prevention duty and relief duty.

### **Staff**

The homelessness service has expanded to manage the changed duties and responsibilities of the HRA. The team now comprises four 'Homelessness Prevention Officer' roles to undertake the Prevention Duty. Four 'Homelessness Prevention & Relief Officer' now manage the relief and main duty. In addition, a 'Customer Support & Admin Officer' role manages the increased administration triggered by the HRA. Changes to the team's structural transformation, we can confirm that it has been a beneficial and constructive change that has allowed Housing to operate and deliver the service successfully.

### **Process**

The customer journey has changed significantly since the introduction of the HRA. Under the old legislation, initial contact was made by the client via the triage Housing Line managed by Housing Advisors. If clients were homeless or threatened with homelessness within 28 days, they would be booked in for an appointment with a Housing Options officer who would determine whether they are owed a homelessness duty.

In the new system clients still make their initial contact via the triage Housing line which is managed by a duty Homelessness Prevention Officer. Eligible applicants are firstly booked in for 'Document Check' appointment where they meet our Customer Support & Admin Officer to complete the Housing Advice application form. Following this, they are booked in to see a Prevention Officer if they are threatened with homelessness within 56 days or a Prevention & Relief Officer if they are homeless. Applicants work with the Officers to produce a personalised housing plan which sets out reasonable steps for the individual and Council to take in order to either prevent or relieve homelessness. Daily meetings are held to discuss and allocate cases. This collective approach has enhanced the team's effectiveness.