

## Spelthorne Homelessness Strategy 14-19: Review of Action Plan

### Strategic priority 1: Adopt a corporate and partnership commitment to preventing homelessness

| No. | What we said we would do                                    | How we said we would do it  | What progress we have made   |
|-----|---|---|--|
| 1.1 | Adopt a homelessness strategy                               | Homelessness strategy presented to Council  | The existing 14-19 strategy was commissioned at Cabinet on 15 July 2014, with the final version approved by Cabinet on 30 September 2014.  |
| 1.2 | Establish an Spelthorne Borough Council (SBC) Housing Forum | Agree terms of reference and membership.<br>Partnership commitment confirmed at Forum.<br>Commit to annual review of action plans associated with the Housing Strategy/<br>Private sector strategy and the Homelessness strategy. | To date, an SBC Housing Forum has not been set up, although for the past twelve months, SBC has joined Runnymede Borough Council's Homelessness Task Group meetings. Consideration is currently being had as to the merits of a combined cross-border group, versus a separate one for Spelthorne. |

**Strategic priority 2: Develop and provide a comprehensive prevention housing options service**

| No. | What we said we would do   | How we said we would do it  | What progress we have made   |
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| 2.1 | Develop a 'triage system' to filter all presenting cases relating to housing options and homelessness prevention                             | Review current arrangements.<br>Write new procedures that deal with the following: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Housing options advice relating to general needs and prevention of homelessness</li> <li>• Housing options advice relating to special needs and prevention of homelessness.</li> <li>• Procedure for dealing with application under the Housing Act 1996 and the discharge of duty into the private rented sector.</li> <li>• Emergency and temporary accommodation.</li> </ul> | The Homelessness Reduction Act 2017 has resulted in an entire new suite of processes and procedures, which now outdate the processes we said we would do when the strategy was implemented.<br><br>All cases are offered an assessment, and where applicants are identified as threatened with homelessness, or actually homeless, they are offered a personal housing plan to either prevent or relieve their homelessness. |
| 2.2 | Identify the reasons for 'no fault' evictions and establish action plan to deal with aspects relating to Council or partner responsibilities | Review existing data.<br>Review Housing benefit arrangements<br>Establish action plan.  | With the implementation of the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017, there was little resource available to progress this action.   |
| 2.3 | With partners develop educational and pre-tenancy training courses   | Prepare information pack and interactive materials for SBC website and for local schools and youth clubs.<br>Prepare materials for use by the Housing options team when working with vulnerable applicants prior to taking up a tenancy.<br>Through the Housing Forum consider development of pre-tenancy training with other agencies.   | With the implementation of the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017, there was little resource available to progress this action. We plan to carry this action forward to the next strategy.  |

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| 2.4 | Improve the life chances of households vulnerable to becoming homeless | <p>Through the Housing Forum identify the range of support available to vulnerable households as they relate to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Welfare benefits advice</li><li>• Access to training and employment</li><li>• Debt counselling</li><li>• Furniture and white goods</li><li>• Food banks</li><li>• Volunteering projects</li><li>• Access to internet</li></ul> | <p>With the implementation of the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017, there was little resource available to progress this action. We plan to carry this action forward to the next strategy.</p> |
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**Strategic priority 3: End the use of bed and breakfast accommodation by families**

| <b>No.</b> | <b>What we said we would do</b>  | <b>How we said we would do it</b>   | <b>What progress we have made</b>   |
|------------|--|---|---|
| 3.1        | Ensure there are sufficient private rented sector units of a good standard available for homeless households | Keep under active review all the households currently accommodated in B and B and develop a fast track plan to get them moved onto temporary accommodation.<br>Support the establishment of the SBC Lettings agency (see below)<br>Work with local lettings agencies and the SBC lettings agency to secure sufficient PRS homes for presenting clients. | Whilst we have not ended the use of B&B accommodation by families we have significantly reduced the number of out-of-borough placements and reduced the average length of time for B&B users over the last five years.<br><br>Our Spelthorne Rent Assure scheme was established in December 2016 and has seen great success. This is explained in more detail under strategic priority 6. |

**Strategic priority 4: Facilitate the discharge of the homelessness duty into the private rented sector**

| No. | What we said we would do   | How we said we would do it   | What progress we have made   |
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| 4.1 | Prepare procedures for the processing of applications under the Housing Act 1996   | Review current approach and draft new procedures   | New policy for the discharge into the private sector has been in place since 2014.<br>Revised procedures were drawn up in early 2018 in light of the implementation of Homelessness Reduction Act 2017. These were subsequently updated in February 2019 following clarifications in the Code of Guidance, and experiences over the first year of the new legislation. |
| 4.2 | Prepare a communications campaign for the general public on the change of approach | Devise materials for use in the campaign including reasoning behind the decision; timescales for implementation; simple guides for those in housing need; information for the SBC website. | No action.   |
| 4.3 | Train all staff in the new approach  | Prepare training materials and run in-house course for all Housing Options front line staff and managers   | Training in this area has been ongoing, but issues with data quality have been raised by the Homelessness Review which will need addressing in the new strategy. There is a clear need for ongoing training and support for officers to make legally sound and robust decisions.   |

**Strategic priority 5: Through the Housing Forum develop housing pathways for vulnerable groups**

| No. | What we said we would do   | How we said we would do it   | What progress we have made  |
|-----|--|--|---|
| 5.1 | Identify all the vulnerable groups   | <p>Through the Housing Forum review data and research relating to vulnerable groups.</p> <p>Identify all bespoke service providers and voluntary groups engaged with these client groups.</p>  | <p>As per 1.2, an SBC Housing Forum has not been set up.</p> <p>Since the introduction of the Homeless Reduction Act 2017, we prepared statutory pathway plans required for the identified groups.</p>  |
| 5.2 | Develop housing option pathways for each of the groups (starting with the largest / most at risk groups) | <p>Pathway template devised to include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Advice</li> <li>• Practical support</li> <li>• Specialist housing available</li> <li>• Supported housing offer</li> <li>• Pre-tenancy training</li> </ul> | <p>As a result of the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017, the Council is required to have pathway plans for a number of different client groups including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a) persons released from prison or youth detention accommodation,</li> <li>b) care leavers,</li> <li>c) former members of the regular armed forces,</li> <li>d) victims of domestic abuse,</li> <li>e) persons leaving hospital,</li> <li>f) persons suffering from a mental illness or impairment, and</li> <li>g) any other group that the authority identify as being at particular risk of homelessness in the authority's district.</li> </ul> <p>These pathway plans have been created in partnership with the relevant partner agency, and are 'living documents' which can evolve in time.</p> |

**Strategic priority 6: Develop a private sector offer through working with landlords and through a SBC lettings agency and the acquisition of SBC properties for use as temporary accommodation**

| No. | What we said we would do  | How we said we would do it   | What progress we have made   |
|-----|---|--|--|
| 6.1 | Establish a SBC lettings agency   | Identify the SBC offer to landlords<br>Consider the governance models for a letting agency (in-house; voluntary sector; housing company?) and prepare a business case.<br>Launch the lettings agency and agree targets for year one. | The Rent Assure Scheme was set up in 2016 to offer competitive market rent to landlords who offer their properties to the Council for homeless families. This was in addition to the existing Bond Scheme which was set up in 2007.<br><br>To April 2019, there are 59 landlords signed up to the rent assure scheme, across 78 properties. In addition to the 245 landlords signed up to the existing Bond Scheme, across 368 properties. |
| 6.2 | Acquire a portfolio of SBC properties   | Prepare business case for Council approval for use of reserves to buy properties.<br>Establish governance arrangements (see above).<br>Procure management agent for day to day running of the portfolio.                             | Knowle Green Estates was set up in May 2016 following the purchase of Harper House in Ashford. Since then, the Assets team has significantly expanded its portfolio, and is currently working on six sites which will yield 283 privately rented homes, a number of which will be available to the Council's housing department for nomination.  |
| 6.3 | Work with local lettings agencies to secure further private sector rental units | Ongoing liaison and marketing to the PRS sector.   | Since the launch of our Rent Assure Scheme in December 2016 the Rent Assure team has liaised with lettings agencies and managed to secure a number of properties with 10 different local estate agents.  |

**Strategic priority 7: Adopt a 'no second night out' for emergency accommodation**

| <b>No.</b> | <b>What we said we would do</b>                     | <b>How we said we would do it</b>   | <b>What progress we have made</b>  |
|------------|---|---|--|
| 7.1        | Improve the service offer to single homeless people | Secure additional funding through the 'Single homeless fund' for a specialist worker.<br>Include single homeless people in the definition of vulnerable groups and develop a pathway. | Spelthorne Borough Council had a Single Person Complex Case Worker attached to the Family Support Team, funded by the 'single homeless fund'. This post was shared with Elmbridge.   |
| 7.2        | Ensure that there is adequate winter shelter        | Work with local voluntary and faith groups to ensure a cold weather shelter is available  | We worked with Runnymede Borough Council and Elmbridge Borough Council to provide SWEP accommodation in Hersham Road. This was successfully implemented for one year. Since then each borough has made their own arrangements. |

**Strategic priority 8: In partnership with the CAB prevent mortgage repossessions**

| <b>No.</b> | <b>What we said we would do</b>   | <b>How we said we would do it</b>  | <b>What progress we have made</b>   |
|------------|---|--|---|
| 8.1        | Ensure a co-ordinated approach to advising and supporting households vulnerable to mortgage repossessions | Through the Housing Forum identify agencies available to provide assistance. Council to consider developing a business case for a mortgage rescue project using SBC reserves as funding. | As per 1.2, an SBC Housing Forum has not been set up. The mortgage rescue protocol was introduced by national government so there is now earlier preventative work. This is reflected in our statistics which show we have a low number of homeless households from mortgage repossessions. |