

Appendix 4: Our proposed strategic priorities for the next five years

Our strategic homelessness and rough sleeping prevention priorities over the next five years will focus on five key areas:

- End the use of emergency accommodation
- Reduce the length of stay in temporary accommodation
- Nobody sleeps rough in Spelthorne
- Increase use of private rented sector for homelessness prevention and relief
- Invest in staff training and development in order to improve the customer journey within the Housing Options service.

Ending the use of emergency accommodation

We need to ensure that our residents who are facing or who are at risk of homelessness are assisted at the earliest opportunity. Emergency accommodation lacks security and can therefore be disruptive to households; particularly to those with children as found by Children's Commissioner¹. Emergency accommodation is sometimes not ideal and adds to the pressures homeless households are already under. Sometimes placements are out-of-borough which makes it difficult for them to sustain their existing support network and access local services. It is also extremely costly to the council whereby expenditure could be used on greater homelessness preventative methods and long-term solutions. Spelthorne Borough Council currently has a gross budget of £1.5m per year for emergency accommodation. We want to end the use of costly private sector emergency accommodation by utilising the new Harper House, redevelopment of the White House and the temporary accommodation owned by A2 Dominion. We will work to create additional capacity through Knowle Green Estates as required.

How we will achieve this

- In line with the Housing Strategy, to deliver the redevelopment of Harper House throughout 2020/21, and put in place robust housing management and resident support arrangements to keep placement lengths to a minimum.
- Put in place a plan to end the use of emergency accommodation out-of-borough where suitable.
- As part of the Council's housing strategy, Knowle Green Estates will deliver temporary accommodation units in the borough. We will produce a requirements analysis which will detail the specific types of properties needed to meet local need, including accessible units.
- Implement earlier preventative techniques which includes raising awareness and encouraging the use of the 'duty to refer' which was introduced by the Homeless Reduction Act 2017.
- Closely monitor the level of funding for the Council's homeless prevention fund, leveraging in resources from alternative funding streams where possible and as necessary.
- We will ensure there is a provision for a number of accessible units for those with impairments to avoid the use of emergency accommodation.
- Review the way in which residents of emergency accommodation are supported to access settled accommodation

¹ Children's Commissioner (2019). Bleak Houses: Tackling the Crisis of Family Homelessness in England. <https://www.childrenscommissioner.gov.uk/wp-content/uploads/2019/08/cco-bleak-houses-report-august-2019.pdf>

- We will extend existing measures to ensure the quality of accommodation which is offered to homeless households.
- We will require all households in emergency accommodation who are on the Housing Register to register for auto-bidding for all suitable available properties. Suitability will be based on the content of the applicant's personalised housing plan.

Reduce length of stay in temporary accommodation

Whilst temporary accommodation is slightly more secure than emergency accommodation it is still a temporary measure and can still be disruptive to homeless households. Our recent Homelessness Review identified that households in temporary accommodation were on average staying for over a year. Where possible, we want to see a significant reduction in the time homeless households spend in temporary accommodation and see an improvement in the number of households we are moving on to more settled accommodation. This will support the reduction both in numbers of households and length of time they stay in emergency accommodation.

How we will achieve this

- Review and establish robust move-on plans for all residents of temporary accommodation. This will be in partnership with A2 Dominion who own and manage the properties. Regular progress meetings will highlight those who have lived in temporary accommodation for longer than 6 months. This includes liaising and joint working with family support, voluntary organisations and our other partners to establish effective plans and maximise opportunities for identifying suitable alternative and more settled accommodation.
- Work with A2 Dominion to develop the service offer for temporary accommodation. This will include rent levels, quality, fixtures and fittings, as well as move-on plans.
- In line with the Council's Housing Strategy, Knowle Green Estates will deliver accessible housing for those in temporary accommodation ready for move-on, who have specific mobility issues and find it difficult to access suitable accommodation.
- Ensure referrals have been completed for all existing and future residents in temporary accommodation to the Spelthorne Rent Assure Scheme. This is another opportunity to help residents in to privately rented accommodation which is more readily available to use.
- In line with our Housing Strategy, promote and increase the delivery of suitable affordable rented housing in the borough to help expedite the movement from temporary accommodation.

Nobody sleeps rough in Spelthorne

The government's rough sleeping strategy aims to halve rough sleeping by 2022 and eliminate by 2027. We are committed to help achieve this target. Nationally rough sleeping has nearly doubled in the last 8 years. In Spelthorne, the number of rough sleepers has varied over the years but is an increasing trend which represents an extreme form of homelessness. Nobody deserves to be sleeping rough in Spelthorne and we want to ensure our homelessness support and outreach service is maximised to ensure this doesn't happen.

How we will achieve this

- Develop and keep updated a service support map for rough sleepers in Spelthorne to ensure we are maximising the use of nearby services. As part of this mapping exercise, we will identify gaps in service provision across the borough and work with voluntary and faith sectors to address these gaps.
- In partnership with other Surrey authorities, explore adopting a MEAM (Making Every Adult Matter) approach and the capability of appointing a 'navigator' for those who may need additional support in seeking accommodation. Allocating more dedicated time to these types of cases may encourage reengagement with the local authority and supporting services.
- Sustain our current Rough Sleeper Coordinator and Outreach service which ensures anyone who is reported as sleeping rough in Spelthorne is offered support and advice at the earliest opportunity. This will involve considering how this role will fit with the White House Hostel to be developed in 2020/21.
- Work with other agencies to deliver awareness based workshops to local schools and youth clubs to increase awareness of housing options.
- Encourage the public to use StreetLink to notify us of people sleeping rough in the area. This will enable us to reach and offer support to them sooner.
- Work with A2 Dominion, Surrey County Council and other key partner agencies to deliver a Housing First pilot.
- Continue to work with Runnymede and Elmbridge Councils on the delivery of Hersham Road supported accommodation and day service drop-in.
- In line with the Councils Housing Strategy, deliver the White House hostel project in partnership with Homes England and the Salvation Army.
- Develop further links with armed forces charities so that veterans who are already rough sleeping or at risk of rough sleeping are supported appropriately to access and sustain accommodation.

Increase use of the private rented sector for homelessness prevention and relief

Privately rented accommodation is our primary offer of accommodation to households facing homelessness. With the decline in social housing we are seeing a considerable change in how we are able to offer assistance to prevent and relieve homelessness. Strengthening our use of the private rented sector offers us an opportunity to move on homeless households quicker from both emergency and temporary accommodation. We want to encourage as many local landlords, estate agents and property developers to work with us as possible. Increasing our use of the private rented sector allows us to prevent and relieve homelessness at an earlier stage.

How we will achieve this

- In line with our Councils Housing Strategy, ensure our offer to private sector landlords is competitive, robust, affordable, and suitable.
- Use appropriate marketing methods to encourage new landlords to work with us, and ensure that we have a sustainable pipeline of properties to use.
- In order to improve relations with local estate agents and landlords, we will organise a biannual landlord forum. Part of this will market our Spelthorne Rent Assure scheme and the incentives we offer landlords. In partnership with Jobcentre Plus, the event would include a Q&A stall on Universal Credit to provide reassurance and information to landlords.
- Work with Knowle Green Estates to develop and expand affordable private rental sector tenure in accordance with our Housing Strategy aims.
- Work with Citizens Advice Runnymede and Spelthorne social policy team to address and lobby on the broader causes of homelessness such as the challenges of welfare reform.
- In partnership with Jobcentre Plus and Economic Development, design a workable process to effectively support residents who are affected by any welfare reform, in particular the benefit cap and who are finding it difficult to secure work. Focusing on skills including CV advice and tips for job searching.
- Evaluate how discretionary housing payment's (DHP) are allocated to ensure effective targeting of households facing homelessness. This will include making sure we know how we are targeting payments.
- Work with our Environmental Health team on HHSRS (Housing health and safety rating system) inspections to prevent homelessness from properties in poor conditions. This may include the introduction of a housing improvement grant to enable landlords to undertake necessary works, preventing the potential homelessness of the existing residents.
- Work jointly with probation services to ensure that prison leavers and those under licence are supported appropriately in order to prevent re-offending and encouraged to resettle into the community.
- Develop further links with armed forces charities so that currently serving members of the armed forces, veterans and their families are offered appropriate support to access and sustain private rented accommodation.

Invest in staff training and development in order to improve the customer journey within the Housing Options service.

Residents who are unfortunately at risk or are threatened with homelessness are going through a potentially stressful and detrimental point in their life. Improving our Housing Options team's customer service skills will help us to deliver homelessness advice and support in a more empathic and understanding manner. A recent Housing Options service user survey completed by Spelthorne Borough Council reflected comments in regards to the customer service skills at Spelthorne Borough Council. We endeavour to listen to our residents and want to improve this aspect of our service.

How we will achieve this

- We will continue working with other Surrey authorities to access shared training events.
- Seek to implement relevant recommendations from the forthcoming Ministry of Housing Communities and Local Government's (MHCLG) review of the implementation of the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017.
- Improve the Housing section on the Spelthorne Borough Council's website to ensure it is easily accessible and has a clear directory of the services available in the local area for households threatened or experiencing homelessness.
- Agree annual training plans with members of the team. Open up more opportunities for our Housing Options staff to develop their skills and knowledge of housing and homelessness advice. We will offer staff relevant courses and qualifications and membership to the Chartered Institute of Housing.
- We will review the channels by which customers contact us with an intention of making it simpler and easier to get in touch with us.
- We will implement opportunities for us to collect customer feedback. This will allow us to make more timely reviews of service delivery, and help us to better inform policy development.
- Appoint a member of the Housing Options team to complete a monthly data quality check. This will ensure regular monitoring of our data on homelessness in the borough, and identify staff training requirements where patterns of issues are identified. Improving data quality monitoring will better inform our decision making on preventing homelessness.