

Homelessness Strategy update – April 2024

The housing department has made significant progress since the implementation of the strategy in November 2022. This is the update for the first full year of the strategy 2023/24, which shows completed tasks, ongoing work and identifies work streams moving forward.

The current climate in which officers operate is unprecedented. Officers are consistently having to push back against other statutory agencies making inappropriate referrals, dealing with a desperate client group who are increasingly taking their frustration and anger out on officers through verbal and non-verbal threats of harm to officers and/or themselves.

Many of the factors present at the implementation of the strategy are still relevant now though the working environment has become even more demanding, due to the ongoing cost-of-living crisis, continued poor housing supply, rental increases and a lack of resources for other agencies.

Despite the commitment and hard work of officers, there has been a slow but steady increase in nightly paid (NP) placements, which for the first time since the pandemic inched above 90 for several weeks towards the end of the financial year, resulting in increased costs towards temporary accommodation placements. The rise in placements is the result of a steady increase in approaches throughout the year, Q1: 57, Q2: 76, Q3: 66 and Q4: 93.

On a positive note, we have successfully recruited to the final housing options officer post and have added a temporary accommodation apprentice to the team which will enable us to be more proactive in publicising the PSL scheme. We are hopeful of recruiting to the vacant housing adviser role in April, which if successful will ensure we have a full team for the first time since June 2023.

Critically, the approval of the scheme at 79-81 East St, with a 50% affordable rented element and the potential that it may even deliver a fully affordable scheme, means that we have some affordable housing in the pipeline and the potential delivery of the micro homes project(s), with the aim to increase in-borough temporary accommodation, will have a significant impact on nightly paid expenditure.

Objective 1 - The early identification, intervention & prevention of homelessness

- The Housing Options (Move On) Officer, recruited in June 2023, has had a very positive impact and helped to move on over 65 homeless households into temporary accommodation, either moving them on from NP accommodation or preventing them from being placed in NPA. This work has resulted in a reduction in the net costs of NPA from November and has also led to a reduction in void costs the council incurs from our RSL TA providers. Once the team is fully staffed, this role will be even more proactive.
- Regular operational meetings with partners including DWP, CAB and the Food Bank are held to improve early identification and prevention approach.

- A Surrey wide Mental Health protocol is now in place. – Following Surrey wide training for all associated professionals, barring the occasional emergency, this appears to be working as well as can be expected considering the increase in Secure Hospital admissions.
- Commitment to refer – protocol in place with Registered Providers to ensure early identification and intervention to prevent eviction.
- Homechoice & PHPs – PHP's continue to be refined with the emphasis on achievable tasks. Hyperlinks to the Homechoice for Advice Leaflets will be added.
- Homelessness Prevention Fund utilised for rent deposit scheme, rent tops up and temporary payments to prevent homelessness.

Objective 2 - Reduce rough sleeping

- The Single Person Housing Options Officer (SPHOO), recruited in November 2022, has proven to be an enormous success. She has worked closely with East Surrey Outreach Service (ESOS) to successfully find solutions for several entrenched and hard-to-place street homeless, who have been bouncing between agencies for years. During this work she has developed close working relationships with other key agencies.
- One long term entrenched rough sleeper has been assisted into private rented accommodation and another has moved on and no-longer appears to be rough sleeping in the borough. Significant progress has been with EEBC's long term rough sleeper we now have a housing pathway plan in place.
- Two RSAP Housing First properties were purchased by Transform in 2023. Both are occupied by EEBC nominations. We are currently reviewing the possibility of adding a further one or two 'supported' units within the temporary accommodation stock, depending on the availability of appropriate units and ongoing revenue funding.
- The Ending Rough Sleeping Delivery Plan was updated for 2023/24 and submitted to DLUHC.
- Summer SWEP (Severe Weather Emergency Provision) approach was agreed with key partners.
- The SPHOO is heavily involved in the identifying and treating Hepatitis C campaign.
- We have started work with partner LAs to recontract the East Surrey Outreach Service (ESOS) for a further 3 years.
- A new Ending Rough Sleeping Plan for 24/25 is being developed jointly with East Surrey D&B's to be submitted to DLUHC on 31/04/24.

Objective 3 - Increase accommodation options

- Regular meetings are held with key providers to increase opportunities/options for new housing development.
- The Housing Delivery Group meets quarterly to consider the housing potential of EEBC and other public body assets, including Fairview Road and Stoneleigh library. The group is currently working on bringing forward a variety of projects, including micro homes, Ewell Court cottage and partnership opportunities.
- The Strategic Housing Manager has responded to Local Plan consultation with specific reference to the Supplementary Planning Document (SPD), to ensure

robust policy in place to increase affordable housing delivery on section 106 development sites. In addition, we hold quarterly meetings with the Planning Policy Manager to shape affordable housing policy.

- We are working closely with Housing Benefit and TCH to downsize households in social housing to free up larger accommodation, which has resulted in more than 11 properties being made available.
- We continue to expand the Private Sector Leasing (PSL) scheme, with a new property taken on in April 2024 and have started planning for a Landlord Forum to be held in Autumn 2024.
- We have also added further resource to the TA section through the recruitment of an apprentice, to assist with PSL expansion and TA management.

Objective 4 – Improve the health and wellbeing of homeless people

- Ongoing work with Surrey Adults Matter (SAM) to improve coordination between agencies and improve outcomes for individuals.
- Ongoing work in relation to Bridge the Gap. SCC looking for funding to expand scheme in future years.
- We have collated a GP access list to enable homeless people to access a GP.

Objective 5 - Ensure sufficient support is available for homeless people

- The East Surrey contract with ESOS/Thames Reach has been extended until September 2024, to enable work to commence on the procurement of new contract, which is intended to cover a three-year period.
- Continue to refer to ETHOS to assist with skills and employment.
- The new Move-On officer post is supporting homeless households in temporary accommodation and ensuring that households have a move on plan.

Objective 6 - Partnership Working

- Regular meetings held with Mount Green Housing to review opportunities and assets.
- Strategic meeting with TCH set up in January 2023 and meeting biannually. Looking at various options including estate improvement and regeneration, including temporary accommodation.
- Protocols agreed and in place to ensure effective partnership working.
- We are planning to hold a Homelessness Forum with key partners in Q1 2024/25 to improve relationships with partners.