

Homelessness update – February 2025

The housing department has made significant progress since the implementation of the strategy in November 2022. This is the update for up to the end of quarter 3 2024/25 of the strategy, which shows completed tasks, ongoing work and identifies work streams moving forward.

The current climate in which officers operate remains incredibly challenging. The reasons for this have been well documented at previous committees though can be broadly summarised as follows:

- Resource pressures at other statutory agencies resulting in significant pressure on the housing department due to inappropriate referrals.
- Low affordable housing supply.
- Small and expensive private rented sector.
- The ongoing cost-of-living crisis, resulting in a lower number of customers able to access rented accommodation.

An increasingly desperate client group, some of whom take their frustration and anger out on officers through verbal and non-verbal threats of harm to officers and/or themselves.

Despite the commitment and hard work of officers, there continues to be a slow but steady increase in nightly paid (NP) placements, which has not dropped below high 80s and often pushed well into the 90s throughout the year, resulting in increased costs towards temporary accommodation placements. The rise in placements is the result of a steady increase in homelessness approaches, which is over 20% higher than the same period 2023/24.

In addition, we have had some significant staff challenges which due to the small size of the team has had a considerable impact.

On a positive note, in January we successfully recruited maternity cover for one of the housing options officer posts, who will start in March. We also recruited to the housing adviser role in June 2024.

In addition, the Strategic Housing Manager is currently undertaking a service review, which will focus on workflows and processes to ensure the team is working to its maximum efficiency. The review will also consider how best to utilise the additional £135,000 Homelessness Prevention Grant (HPG) for 2025/26, of which 49% is earmarked for homelessness prevention measures, which will help boost our homelessness prevention work.

Critically, the approval of the modular home scheme at Fairview Road and the successful application for Local Authority Housing Fund 3 (LAHF3) funding, will enable us to deliver 8 additional family-sized temporary accommodation units, will positively impact nightly paid expenditure and increase the number of in-borough temporary accommodation.

We held a Landlord's Forum in September 2024, which was well attended and has led to a slow trickle of enquiries related to the Private Sector Leasing (PSL) scheme.

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 83 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. The service review will look into potentially recruiting a similar role.
- Regular operational meetings with partners including DWP, CAB and the Food Bank are held to improve early identification and prevention approach.
- We continue to monitor the effectiveness of the Surrey-wide Mental Health protocol as the number of secure hospital admissions continue to rise.
- Commitment to refer – protocol in place with Registered Providers to ensure early identification and intervention to prevent eviction.
- Homechoice & PHPs – PHPs 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 continues to work closely with East Surrey Outreach Service (ESOS) to successfully find solutions for entrenched and hard-to-place street homeless and has developed close working relationships with other key agencies. This post is funded by the Rough Sleeper Initiative (RSI), initially until November 2025 but we have recently received confirmation that this will continue for an additional year.
- The SPHOO has ensured the long-term entrenched rough sleeper who was assisted into private rented accommodation early last year, has successfully maintained their tenancy despite significant challenges and lack of engagement from key agencies.
- The Ending Rough Sleeping Delivery Plan was updated for 2023/24 and signed off by the Ministry of Housing Communities and Local Government (MHCLG)
- Summer and winter SWEP (Severe Weather Emergency Provision) approach has been agreed with key partners.
- The SPHOO was heavily involved in the identifying and treating Hepatitis C campaign.
- We partnered with neighbouring LAs in May to recontract the East Surrey Outreach Service (ESOS) for a further 3 years.
- Additional MHCLG funding of £14,612 was received in January 2025 for Rough Sleeping Winter Pressures 2024/25.

Objective 3 - Increase accommodation options

- Regular meetings are held with key providers, including Town & Country Housing (TCH) 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. The group is currently working on bringing forward a variety of projects, including the modular home scheme at Fairview Road and options for the Depot Road car park.
- The Strategic Housing Manager has worked closely with the Planning Policy Manager to shape affordable housing policy in the Local Plan, via the Supplementary Planning Document (SPD).
- 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 15 properties being made available 2024/25.
- We continue to expand the Private Sector Leasing (PSL) scheme, with the most recent property in November and another due to be added in March 2025 and we successfully held a Landlord Forum in September 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.
- Work ongoing with Surrey County Council, in the form of the Mental Health and Housing Forums and Mental Health Rough Sleeper work.
- *MTI have engaged with the Council offering direct referrals to Supported Accommodation.*
- 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

- A new East Surrey contract with ESOS/Thames Reach has been put in place until 2027.
- Continue to refer to ETHOS to assist with skills and employment.
- The move-on officer supports homeless households in temporary accommodation and helps households implement their 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 with partner agencies to ensure effective partnership working.