



Hertsmere's Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy

2019 - 2023

Large print and languages

Hertsmere Borough Council aims to provide information in alternative formats where possible.

If you would like a document in a different language or format please call 020 8207 7445 or email customer.services@hertsmere.gov.uk and we will do our best to help.

Please allow sufficient time for any document to be translated.

تهدف بلدية منطقة هارنسمير (Hertsmere Borough Council) إلى توفير المعلومات بصيغ بديلة إذا كان ذلك ممكناً.

إذا اردت أي وثيقة بلغة أو بصيغة أخرى يرجى الاتصال برقم الهاتف 020 8207 7445 أو إرسال بريد إلكتروني customer.services@hertsmere.gov.uk وسنبذل قصارى جهدنا لمساعدتك. يرجى منحنا وقتاً كافياً لترجمة أي وثيقة مطلوبة.

Hertsmere 自治区政府旨在可能的情况下提供信息的其它格式版本。

如果你想得到以简体中文或其它格式制作的版本，请致电 020 8207 7445，或发送电邮至 customer.services@hertsmere.gov.uk，我们将尽力提供帮助。请预留足够的时间，以便让我们完成有关文件的翻译。

Rada miejska Hertsmere Borough Council zamierza dostarczać wszelkie informacje, tam gdzie jest to możliwe, w różnych formatach.

Jeżeli ktoś chciałby otrzymać dokument w innym języku lub formacie proszony jest zatelefonować na numer 020 8207 7445 lub przesłać e-mail do customer.services@hertsmere.gov.uk a my zrobimy wszystko by pomóc. Prosimy uwzględnić czas na przetłumaczenie każdego dokumentu.

ਹਰਟਸਮੀਅਰ ਬੋਰੋ ਕੌਂਸਿਲ ਜਿੱਥੇ ਵੀ ਹੋ ਸਕੇ, ਜਾਣਕਾਰੀ ਹੋਰ ਰੂਪਾਂ ਵਿੱਚ ਦੇਣ ਦਾ ਯਤਨ ਕਰਦੀ ਹੈ।

ਜੇ ਤੁਹਾਨੂੰ ਕੋਈ ਦਸਤਾਵੇਜ਼ ਕਿਸੇ ਹੋਰ ਬੋਲੀ ਵਿੱਚ, ਜਾਂ ਕਿਸੇ ਹੋਰ ਰੂਪ ਵਿੱਚ ਚਾਹੀਦਾ ਹੈ, ਤਾਂ ਕਿਰਪਾ ਕਰਕੇ ਨੰਬਰ 020 8207 7445 'ਤੇ ਫ਼ਨ ਕਰੋ, ਜਾਂ ਇਸ ਪਤਾ customer.services@hertsmere.gov.uk 'ਤੇ ਈਮੇਲ ਭੇਜੋ। ਅਸੀਂ ਤੁਹਾਡੀ ਮਦਦ ਕਰਨ ਦੀ ਪੂਰੀ ਕੋਸ਼ਿਸ਼ ਕਰਾਂਗੇ। ਕਿਰਪਾ ਕਰਕੇ ਇਹ ਯਾਦ ਰੱਖੋ ਕਿ ਦਸਤਾਵੇਜ਼ ਦਾ ਤਰਜਮਾ ਹੋਣ ਨੂੰ ਕੁਝ ਸਮਾਂ ਲਗਦਾ ਹੈ।

Hertsmere Borough Council
Civic Offices, Elstree Way
Borehamwood, Herts WD6 1WA

Tel: 020 8207 2277
Fax: 020 8207 2197
Website: www.hertsmere.gov.uk

Produced by Hertsmere Design and Print Services
Tel: 020 8207 7416 Fax: 020 8207 2197
Email: design@hertsmere.gov.uk

Contents

Foreword	4
Introduction	5
Our key achievements since 2015	6
The Strategy	8
Offer a range of support and advisory services to those presenting as or threatened with homelessness regardless of need at the earliest opportunity	9
Support vulnerable people and avoid homelessness (including rough sleepers, those with complex needs and victims of domestic abuse or modern slavery)	11
Increase the supply of affordable accommodation	14
Continue to develop partnership initiatives to prevent homelessness	17
Continue to work towards the Gold Standard for Housing services	19

Foreword



I am pleased to introduce Hertsmere's Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy 2019 - 2023.

Our commitment to increasing the supply of affordable housing is set out in our 20:20 Vision, and the new strategy sets out our vision, together with key organisations across the borough, for preventing homelessness.

The development of our strategy comes at a time of considerable change in housing, homelessness and welfare policy. As the borough continues to become a desired place to live, affordable housing remains a key constraint to local residents and one of the greatest challenges we face as a society.

Since our last strategy we have had some key successes and continue to remain committed to reducing homelessness and the strategy sets our key priorities for facing future challenges for housing in the borough and demonstrates our collaborative approach to tackling these.

We have developed this strategy in partnership with key voluntary and statutory agencies and in consultation with the local community.

**Councillor Jean Heywood,
Portfolio Holder for Housing and Transport**

Introduction

The Homelessness Act 2002 sets out a requirement for Local Authorities to carry out a review of homelessness and develop a new homelessness strategy every five years.

The Council last published a homelessness strategy in 2014 and, given the significant changes to homelessness legislation, felt a new review and strategy was required to accurately reflect changing priorities.

There are two parts to this document:

Part 1: Key successes since the last strategy was published

Part 2: Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy: sets out our new vision and priorities for preventing homelessness in the future.

The Strategy is largely focused on the Homelessness Review which sets out the national and local picture of the level and causes of homelessness and reviews current and required future services to meet the changing needs of our residents

Consultation

We would like to thank the variety of stakeholders who provided comments and feedback which helped shape our priorities for the next five years. These include: members of our Homelessness Forum, service users and key partners within the borough.

We would also like to thank the East of England Local Government Association who produced the initial draft Homelessness Review and provided recommendations for improvements in service provision across the Housing department.

This strategy will provide a framework for Hertsmere Borough Council and partners to make best use of resources, learn from best practice and use innovative approaches to prevent homelessness.

Our key achievements since 2015

Review and restructure of the Housing team

The review allowed the team to maximise its resources and a number of new teams and positions were created: the Temporary Accommodation team, a Housing Initiatives post focusing on developing our private sector offer to landlords to let their property with us, a Team Leader for Homelessness Prevention and a Housing Strategy Manager to develop a strategic approach for Housing moving forward.

Creation of a Temporary Accommodation team and review of accommodation provision

The creation of the Temporary Accommodation team has allowed more comprehensive monitoring and development of:

- Appropriate placements in to temporary accommodation and making the best use of accommodation available to us;
- Ensuring clients receive ongoing support;
- Partnerships with temporary accommodation providers;
- Ensuring appropriate and sufficient block booking of properties;
- Monitoring and regular reviews of clients' rent accounts to minimise rent arrears and increase repayment plans from clients.

Corporate approach to separate leases that previously consisted of a shop and flat above into leases for the shop only, in order to use Council owned properties as temporary accommodation

This has allowed us to ensure a high quality of accommodation is provided and provide some properties as furnished, relieving pressure for clients to purchase their own furniture before moving in to temporary accommodation.

Creation of Hertsmere Developments Limited, a Council owned property development company

The company will assist the Council to:

- deliver its regeneration, housing, financial and commercial objectives;
- deliver more affordable housing within the borough for those in housing need.

A comprehensive review of our Allocations Policy

The review has enabled:

- Increased support for applicants to continue to look for accommodation in the private rented sector for properties whilst on the housing register;
- Young families are now encouraged to stay in current residency where possible rather than becoming homeless and needing placement in temporary accommodation;
- Removing the community contribution due to employment. This is to redirect and concentrate the supply of affordable housing to those in housing need.

Creation of the Homelessness Forum

The Forum was set up in 2017 and brings together all statutory and voluntary agencies that have an interest in enhancing housing provisions, maximising the use of early intervention and preventing homelessness across Hertsmere in a cohesive and coordinated approach.

The Forum has also been key in the review of this Strategy to develop joint priorities and actions to achieve them and the commitment to continuing developing the Forum into a regular meeting is mentioned in the both the Review and Strategy.

Creation of the Landlords Forum

The Forum, set up in 2017, meet quarterly and is well attended by landlords operating in the borough. It is a useful opportunity to engage with the private sector and work together with landlords to enhance the quality of private rented accommodation in the borough and discuss the key challenges we are facing in the Housing team.

The Strategy

Our vision

'To continue to work in partnership to prevent homelessness'

Our priorities

Offer a range of support and advisory services to those presenting as or threatened with homelessness regardless of need at the earliest opportunity.

Support vulnerable people and avoid homelessness (including rough sleepers, those with complex needs and victims of domestic abuse or modern slavery).

Increase the supply of affordable accommodation.

Continue to develop partnership initiatives to prevent homelessness.

Continue to work towards the gold standard for Housing services.

Links to other Council strategies

In order to ensure a Council wide approach to tackling housing need in the borough and ensure a high quality of housing is offered to residents, both in the private and social sector, this strategy has close links with the following:

- ↳ The Council's Corporate Plan 2018/2019 which sets out our 2020 vision with particular emphasis on increasing the supply of affordable housing and implementing key housing strategies such as the Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy;
- ↳ Health and Wellbeing Strategy 2018 - 2022 where a focus on taking action to deal with poor housing and supporting vulnerable individuals are prioritized;
- ↳ Affordable Housing Supplementary Planning Document, adopted in 2015 which sets out the requirement for affordable housing on developments over 10 units;
- ↳ Local Plan 2012 - 2027 Core Strategy, setting out the Council's vision for development in the borough until 2027;
- ↳ Empty Homes Strategy 2018 - 2022, focused on reducing the levels of empty homes within the borough and supporting landlords who may be facing difficulties doing so;
- ↳ Housing Enforcement Policy, adopted in 2018 which focuses on enforcement action required by the Private Sector Housing team to maintain and improve housing conditions throughout the borough;
- ↳ Gypsy and Traveller Accommodation Assessment 2017 which outlines the current and future need for gypsy, traveller and travelling showpeople accommodation in the borough.

Offer a range of support and advisory services to those presenting as or threatened with homelessness regardless of need at the earliest opportunity

Context

The Homelessness Reduction Act 2017 has placed new legal duties to Local Authorities from April 2018 so that everyone who is homeless or at risk of becoming homeless will have access to meaningful help, irrespective of their priority need status, as long as they are eligible for housing assistance.

The Council is committed to providing a high standard of housing advice and options for all customers. It is important to appreciate the value that other organisations within the Borough have on providing support and advice to those in need.

Citizens Advice Bureau (CAB) are one of the organisations that offer high quality advice and information for people who live and work in the borough. The Council fund CAB to provide housing, money and debt advice. Clients can also be supported by CAB if they wish to challenge the Council's decisions.

Early provision of housing advice may aid an individual in taking appropriate steps to prevent homelessness.

The Council conduct an assessment with all eligible applicants who are homeless or threatened with homelessness and develop a personal housing plan with the client. This person centred approach will ensure the Council is working with the client to set out steps that the individual and Council must take for the client to remain in or find suitable accommodation.

Under the Section 213B Duty to Refer in the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017 there is a duty for specified public bodies to notify the Council if a service user they support is homeless or threatened with homelessness, with the individual's consent. Guidance for organisations can be found on the Council's website.

Challenges

In 2018/19 the three most common reasons for homelessness were:

- Parental eviction;
- Other friends/relatives eviction;
- Loss of private sector assured short-hold tenancy.

Comparing April 2018 and April 2019 there has been a 57% increase in approaches for housing advice.

Housing and rental prices have increased significantly in recent years and the Local Housing Allowance can restrict those on lower incomes being able to privately rent.

57%

increase in
approach for
housing
advice

April
2018



April
2019



Achieving the priority

In order to achieve the priority set out the Council will:

- 1) Establish protocols with social housing providers in relation to evictions:
 - for sound advice to be provided by the Council to those at risk of losing their tenancy at the earliest possibility;
 - to work with the client or provider if possible to resolve issues;
 - to agree a procedure of notifying the Council should an eviction be decided.
- 2) Giving the right information at the right time:
 - Ensure officers are fully trained for the new legislation and provide basic training for Councillors on the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017;
 - Ensure up to date details of the services the Council provide are disseminated to those attending the Homelessness Forum and Landlords' Forum;
 - Review information currently distributed to partners and the public and ensure these are up to date and fit for purpose;
 - Review the information provided on the Council's website to reflect the changes to Council's required duties;
 - Develop an approach with the Council's Customer Services team to ensure accurate information is given and customers are referred to the most appropriate team if necessary.
- 3) Develop partnerships with local organisations to provide advice at the earliest opportunity:
 - Develop a partnership with Hertfordshire Families First to raise and discuss families that are presenting concerns to either team;
 - Continue funding Herts Young Homeless to provide housing advice and guidance for 16 - 24 year olds;
 - Continue funding Citizen Advice Bureau (CAB) to provide generalist housing advice and money and debt advice. The Council will develop its partnership with CAB to ensure the advice provided is in line with any new legislation or changes to the Council's procedures;
 - Develop a clear pathway for all specified public bodies to refer a person who is homeless or threatened with homelessness to the Council under Section 213B duty in the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017.



Support vulnerable people and avoid homelessness (including rough sleepers, those with complex needs and victims of domestic abuse or modern slavery)

Context

The ultimate aim for the Council is to support an individual to avoid homelessness. On average a homeless individual dies at just 47 years old and those sleeping on the street are almost 17 times more likely to have been victims of violence¹.

A range of vulnerabilities can increase the risk of homelessness and we commit to supporting those with vulnerabilities to try to avoid homelessness.

The vulnerabilities that those accepted as homeless in 2017/18 have presented with have included: dependent children or pregnancy, mental health needs and due to violence including domestic violence.

The Council has 100% nomination rights to two temporary accommodation hostels with the Borough managed by Clarion and Sapphire Independent Housing. These are to cater predominately for either single or joint applicants with dependent children.

There are eight licensed traveller and gypsy sites and the Private Sector Housing team conduct twice yearly visits to the sites to ensure no health and safety concerns are highlighted. There are also a number of unlicensed sites and travellers are increasingly basing themselves at unlicensed sites such as car parks temporarily.

The number of rough sleepers in the borough remains low. The Council utilises StreetLink for the public to raise concerns about anyone who may be rough sleeping. Private Sector Housing Officers currently visit the individual and signpost them to the Council for housing advice however many of those identified are reluctant to accept support.

Hertfordshire County Council offer a range of support services for those affected by domestic abuse. Herts Sunflower is one of these organisations offering a confidential support and signposting service and helpline. Safer Places have recently begun working with the County offering safe accommodation and outreach work for those affected. Hertfordshire Constabulary recorded alcohol as an aggravating factor in 25% of all domestic abuse incidents in 2015/16².

7% of those accepted as homeless in 2017/2018 had mental health challenges as their priority need. Hertfordshire Partnership Foundation Trust provides a range of support services from a Community Mental Health Team to inpatient services. The Adult Community Mental Health Services and Children and Adolescent Mental Health Services are based in the same building as the Council and the Council can signpost an individual to the services.

Challenges

Of those whom the Council accepted a Section 188 duty for following a homelessness approach 70% had dependent children. By placing a family in temporary accommodation there is a risk of distribution

1 Crisis website, About Homelessness, https://www.crisis.org.uk/ending-homelessness/about-homelessness/?gclid=EAlaIqobChMIwrG64I3d3AIVgrTtCh0ZQAKUEAAYASAAEgltM_D_BwE

2 Hertfordshire Domestic Abuse Strategy 2016 - 2019

to support networks, schooling and health services. The limited number of Council owned temporary accommodation units provides difficulties in placing applicants in specific areas. The Council is committed to placing applicants within the borough where possible but there are occasions, especially when a larger family requires placement, that no suitable accommodation is available within the borough and the family must be placed further afield. Residents with larger families may struggle to afford suitable private accommodation given the disparity between Local Housing Allowance Rates and average private rental figures.

Within the borough there are a number of gypsy and traveller sites. The Council's Gypsy and Traveller Accommodation Assessment in 2017 identified a need for 87 additional pitches between 2017 - 2036, the majority of these for households who do not meet the Planning Definition. Gypsy and travellers are often reluctant to engage with statutory services which can make it difficult for the officers to offer advice and support.

The number of identified victims of modern slavery in Hertfordshire has dramatically increased. The latest figures available from 2017 showed there were 47 identified victims whereas in 2016 and 2015 there were 26 and 15 respectively³.

Nationally domestic abuse accounts for 1 in 5 of all violent crimes, in Hertfordshire there is a county wide Domestic Abuse Strategy 2014 - 2019². Although there are several refuges in neighbouring areas, Hertsmere does not have a refuge for those fleeing domestic violence in borough therefore it can be harder to offer specialist services to those in need.

Achieving the priority

In order to achieve the priority set out the Council will:

- 1) Develop partnerships with statutory organisations such as Adult Care Services and Children Services both at a strategic level and operational level:
 - This will enable the Housing team to discuss or highlight any concerns at an appropriate level.
- 2) Ensure appropriate support organisations which are or could be supporting the individual are discussed as part of their Personal Housing Plan completed after an individual approaches as homeless.
- 3) Develop a Temporary Accommodation Policy and review and update procedures.
- 4) Maintain good links with Customer Services who are often the first point of contact for those struggling with housing to ensure they are aware of current legislation and team structure.
- 5) Carry out the recommendations from the Temporary Accommodation Review and keep under annual review (recommendation 9 from the Homelessness Review).

To support those with specific vulnerabilities:

- 6) Domestic violence and modern slavery:
 - Ensure advice given by the Council is correct and easily accessible. This includes advice given via front line officers and on the website;
 - Continue to promote a number of Hertfordshire wide services available to those fleeing domestic abuse;

³ Hertfordshire Police and Crime Commissioner, What is Modern Slavery, <http://www.hertscommissioner.org/modern-slavery>

² Hertfordshire Domestic Abuse Strategy 2016 - 2019

- Ensure temporary accommodation placements for those fleeing domestic abuse are appropriate and the location is suitable. This will be in line with a newly developed Temporary Accommodation policy;
- Review additional safety measures that could be used in Council temporary accommodation properties such as additional locks;
- Continue to attend Multi-Agency Risk Assessment Conferences to share relevant and appropriate information to reduce the risk of serious harm to high risk victims and their children;
- Officers across Housing to raise any concerns for modern slavery after visiting residential or commercial property through the National Referral Mechanism and Hertfordshire Social Care Services;
- Officers to be trained on recognising and responding to safeguarding concerns;
- Representation at the local Anti-Social Behaviour Action Meeting from the Temporary Accommodation team.

7) Gypsy and travellers:

- Conduct site visits for licensed sites twice a year to highlight any concerns within the community or site and to maintain the relationship officers have developed with the community;
- Continue to conduct welfare visits to any illegal gypsy site. Private Sector Housing Officers to liaise with Environmental Health and statutory services such as Social Care Services as required;
- Develop links with Hertfordshire Constabulary's Safer Neighbourhood Teams;
- Attend Hertfordshire Safeguarding Board training and events to review best practice and develop networks with necessary teams and organisations;
- Continue making best use of injunctions to tackle unauthorised traveller encampments.

8) Children and young people:

- Develop links on a management level with Herts Young Homeless to ensure both organisations are collaboratively working when possible;
- As mentioned in priority one, continue funding Herts Young Homeless to provide housing advice and guidance to young people and develop a partnership with Hertfordshire's Families First.

9) Mental health needs:

- Develop a strategic relationship with Hertfordshire Partnership Foundation Trust who offer specialist mental health services for residents;
- Ensure the Council and mental health partners are aware of the services provided by each team and the appropriate pathways into these.

10) Rough sleepers:

- Review which Housing Officers are most appropriate to be visiting those reported to be rough sleeping and make changes if necessary (recommendation 5 from the Homelessness Review);
- Develop a Severe Weather Emergency Policy (SWEP) with local organisations to safeguard those who regularly sleep rough in particularly challenging weather (recommendation 6 from the Homelessness Review).

Increase the supply of affordable accommodation

Context

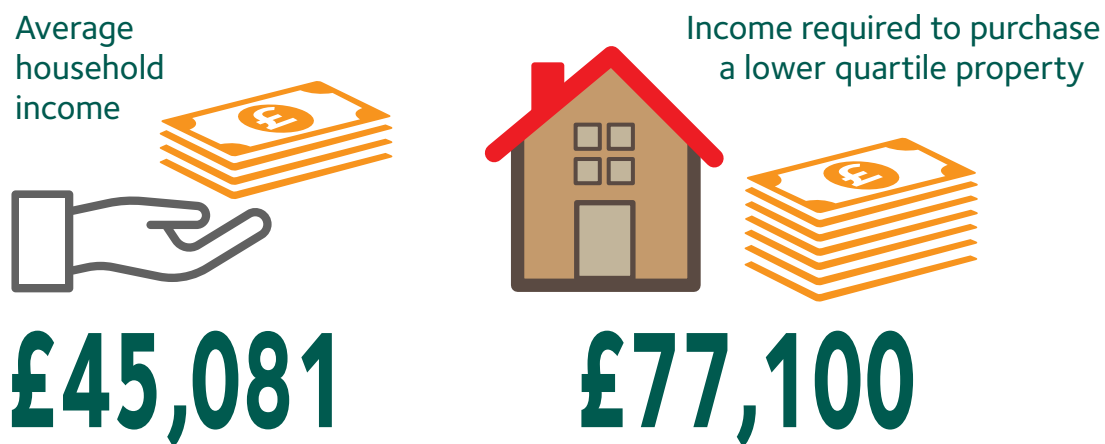
The Council's commitment to increasing the supply of affordable housing can be seen in the Corporate Vision with a focus on Planning for the Future.

As of May 2019, there was 519 applicants on the Council's housing register requiring housing.

The indicative income required to purchase/rent without additional subsidy are⁴:

- £77,100 to purchase a lower quartile property;
- £32,000 to privately rent a lower quartile property;
- £25,600 to rent an 'affordable housing' property.

The average household income in 2015 was £45,081 demonstrating a £32,000 gap between the income required to purchase a property within the Borough.



The 2011 Local Housing Allowance (LHA) rates used for the borough are substantially below the average private rent figures. In Borehamwood, for a two bedroom property the LHA is £855.84, the average price to privately rent a two bedroom property is £1,222. It is therefore not achievable for many to privately rent.

The Council have a number of offers for the private sector:

- Deposit Bond Scheme: designed to assist local people who approach as homeless who are able to privately rent but are unable to afford a deposit. The scheme provides a guaranteed bond equivalent to two months' rent to the landlord, an inventory at the start of the tenancy and refers tenants to private landlords without charging any fees;

⁴ South West Hertfordshire Strategic Housing Market Assessment (2016)

- Private Sector Leasing scheme: in partnership with Notting Hill Genesis who coordinate management of tenancies for private sector landlords;
- PLACE: interest free loans to bring a property up to the required standards. The property will then either be sold or let by the owner through the Council's agreed schemes and a repayment plan agreed.

For planning applications submitted to the Council, the requirements for affordable housing are set out in the Affordable Housing Supplementary Planning Document 2015. The National Planning Policy and subsequent amendments sets out that affordable housing is required for sites developing 10 or more property units and Hertsmere Borough Council's requirement is for 35 - 40% of units to be affordable housing on each new development, depending on the area. The Council has specified a tenure mix for the affordable housing element of a development of 75% social and affordable rent and 25% intermediate which is in line with the requirements of those on the housing register and in housing need.



Challenges

The Council is not a stock holding authority and relies on partnerships with Registered Providers within the borough. As of 2017 there were 7,433 Registered Provider properties within the borough that the Council has full or majority nomination rights for. Whilst this is a relatively large number of properties compared to other neighbouring local authorities, in 2018/19 there were 323 lets for social housing with only 260 of these to new tenants.

The number of lets each year leaves a significant shortfall for housing those in need on the Housing Register.

The Local Housing Allowance (LHA) rates makes it difficult for those claiming benefits to privately rent. There is a £366 gap between LHA rate and the average private rent for a two bedroom property in Borehamwood. Many residents are therefore applying for social and affordable housing.

Previous equity share schemes within the borough have not been particularly popular as the cost was still prohibitive and were competing against Help to Buy within the area.

Between 2013 - 2036 there is a need per annum of 434 properties that qualify as 'affordable'.

The benefits of private rented sector offer schemes are considerable for residents who may struggle to privately rent without some assistance or who may not be applying successfully for social housing. With the prices that could be achieved through private rent, schemes that require rent to be affordable in line with the Local Housing Allowance rates continue to prove difficult to recruit interest from landlords. This results in long waiting times in temporary accommodation to secure settled accommodation via a Registered Provider. Our current schemes are not hugely successful and many other boroughs are using properties within Hertsmere under their Section 193 duty.

Achieving this priority

In order to achieve the priority set out the Council will:

1) Review the offers and schemes for private sector landlords:

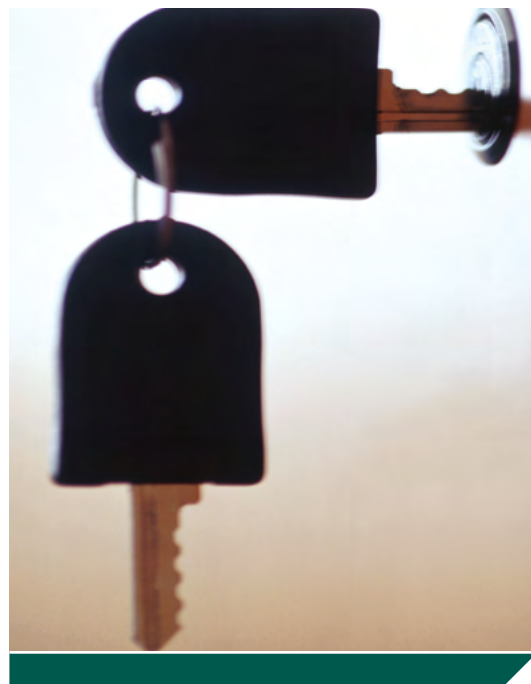
- The introduction of a new position within the Housing team focusing on developing relationships with private sector landlords to house those in housing need;
- Relaunch of a new private sector offer to encourage private landlords to support local need in coordination with the Local Housing Allowance rates;
- Regular reviews of new schemes and their successes/shortfalls in order to constantly improve the services available;
- Working with the Private Sector Housing team to identify landlords who may benefit from additional support in exchange for use of the property to let their property with us;
- Continue to develop the Landlord Forum and Housing managers to attend to present information on Private Sector Offer schemes and to provide detail on the type of clients who may approach the Council as homeless to tackle reluctance from private sector landlords to house those in housing need (recommendation 2 from the Homelessness Review).

2) Involvement in new development proposals and consultations:

- Continue liaising with the Council's Planning department to consult on all planning applications which require Affordable Housing;
- Undertake regular analysis of the Housing Register to review housing need. This should in turn be considered when consulting on tenure mix (property/household size requirements) for planning applications submitted;
- Carry out a review of size and type of affordable homes in the borough to use as a tool to support the Housing Options team and to inform understanding about where new housing provision (and what size/type) should be located (Recommendation 1 in the Homelessness Review).

3) Develop strategic links with Registered Providers:

- To understand any resistance or difficulties in building new social housing developments within the Borough;
- Develop Service Level Agreements with all Registered Providers;
- Develop approaches to make best use of current social housing stock within the borough.



Continue to develop partnership initiatives to prevent homelessness

Context

Nationally and locally, it is evident that housing is not the only cause of homelessness. A range of other factors affects the likelihood of a person becoming homeless. Unemployment and job or financial insecurity, poor physical and mental health and leavers from care, prison or the army are all reasons that could contribute to homelessness.

Agencies working in partnership is fundamental to developing approaches aimed at lowering the risk of homelessness within Hertsmere.

The Council coordinate a Homelessness Forum twice yearly to bring relevant agencies and Registered Providers together to discuss any key changes in legislation and ways to work in collaboration.

There are a vast array of statutory and voluntary organisations to support needs of residents within the borough, many of whom the Council currently works with.

There are a number of agencies residents are likely to engage with before crisis or homelessness for example: health services and Family Centres.

Early detection and prevention are fundamental to ensure a household never reaches crisis point. The Duty to Refer, under the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017, which came in to force on 1st October 2018 sets out a requirement for certain public organisations to notify a local housing authority where one of its service users is homeless or at risk of homelessness with their consent.

Challenges

The need for an holistic approach to prevent homelessness remains a priority across the borough.

The commitment to improving strategic partnerships has been recognised through the creation of a number of new management positions across the team.

As a non-stock holding authority, Registered Providers are often faced with serving eviction notices on tenants who demonstrate anti-social behavior or accrue rent arrears. These individuals often approach the Housing Options team for assistance with accommodation after eviction and often are temporarily accommodated whilst a decision is made regarding their application.

A similar situation occurs in the private rented sector and landlords are currently reluctant to engage with prevention solutions offered due to the increased levels of rent that can be charged in the current rented market.

As there have been a number of key changes to legislation relating to housing and homelessness, we must ensure that partners and local organisations have an understanding of the services provided by the Council and the correct pathways in to the service. This includes those offering ad hoc advice to those they support alongside the Duty to Refer requirements.

Achieving this priority

- 1) Develop partnerships with relevant organisations:
 - Strategic relationships with Registered Providers including quarterly meetings to discuss and implement good practice, highlight concerns and develop ways of working to prevent homelessness;
 - Ensure senior homelessness staff attend multi-agency partner meetings with Hertfordshire County Council (recommendation 7 from the Homelessness Review);
 - Strategic and operational relationship with Hertfordshire County Council Safeguarding and Social Care teams to identify best approach to notifying both teams of concerns;
 - Establish a relationship at a senior level with local mental health services and ensure both teams are aware of the services and appropriate pathways into these (recommendation 8 from the Homelessness Review);
 - Further develop and host a twice yearly Homelessness Forum with relevant statutory and voluntary agencies and Registered Providers (recommendation 4 from the Homelessness Review);
- 2) Make best use of existing housing:
 - Develop approaches to supporting residents to maintain tenancies in coordination with Registered Providers;
 - Establish protocols with social housing providers in relation to the eviction of social housing tenants (recommendation 3 from the Homelessness Review);
 - Promote and encourage reporting of empty homes across the borough to the Private Sector Housing team;
 - Tailored approach to tackling empty homes including support and enforcement action when required e.g. Compulsory Purchases and Empty Dwelling Management Orders;
 - Working with internal teams such as Council Tax for accurate data to support a tailored approach to minimising empty properties;
 - Develop and deliver Empty Homes Refurbishment Scheme, PLACE Scheme where interest free loans to rent to those in housing need or loans to sell are offered and continue presence at County wide forums.
- 3) Continue to engage with private sector landlords:
 - Continue to develop Landlords Forum and use as a platform to engage with landlords across the Borough;
 - Re-launch the private sector offers to engage with private landlords willing to let their properties in coordination with the Council's schemes including: review of Private Sector Leasing Scheme, Bond Deposit Scheme and PLACE scheme;
 - Actively promote private sector offers and engage with those interested regularly;
 - Regular communication and monitoring of popularity of private sector offers and providing an opportunity for landlords and tenants to raise any concerns.

Continue to work towards the Gold Standard for Housing services

Context

The Gold Standard Programme was developed as a result of the 'Making Every Contact Count' report 2012. The report introduced the 10 local challenges aimed at supporting local authorities to improve their frontline housing services and increase opportunities for early intervention and prevention of homelessness.

Following the introduction of the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017 additional duties have been placed on local housing authorities to give advice to all those who approach as, or at risk of becoming, homeless.

As a Council we are committed to striving to work at the Gold Standards suggested and have already taken significant steps towards this. Our corporate commitment, Housing Options service and partnership working at an operational level are areas we feel we currently undertake to a high standard.

We have recently reviewed our temporary accommodation provision to ensure a high quality of property and agreement is in place with the provider and are continually striving to place as many households as possible in borough. This is evident from the Crown Road development of modular units of one and two bedroom properties conveniently located in Borehamwood.

We are however aware that some of the challenges present more difficulty, such as the commitment to implementing a No Second Night Out model and providing a fit for purpose offer to the private rented sector to better utilise this market.

Challenges

Following a restructure to the Housing department, a number of priorities have already undergone significant work, however some areas require a higher level of planning and reviewing before implementation.

Developing a No Second Night Out model is currently difficult as the Council is non-stock holding and no homelessness hostel operates in the borough. We are committed to reviewing this and are actively seeking additional funding from the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government through funding pots which become available.

Partnership working at an operational level relieves some pressure on the team especially for 16 and 17 year olds approaching as homeless. Partnership working at a strategic level with local voluntary and statutory organisations need to be developed to ensure organisations are working holistically to support local people.

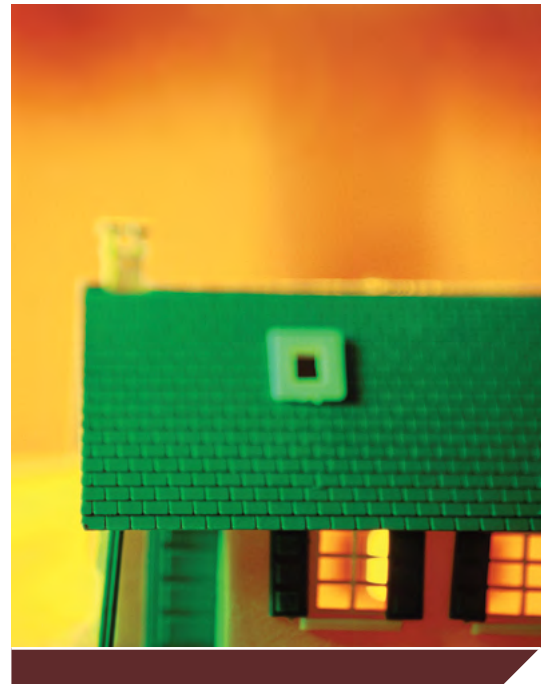
Our current offer to private sector landlords to let their property with us is not fit for purpose and a review is currently being undertaken to consult with the sector in order to increase engagement with our schemes. Some London boroughs are using properties within Hertsmere, offering up to a £7,000 cash incentive for a two bedroom property. This level of cash incentive is not achievable for Hertsmere Borough Council therefore additional support provisions are also being explored to entice landlords.

Achieving this priority

- 1) Adopt a corporate commitment to prevent homelessness which has buy in across all local authority services:
 - Our commitment to tackling homelessness to continue to be highlighted in the Corporate Plan;
 - Operating the Homelessness Forum twice a year to provide a platform to develop awareness of the local response to homelessness and importance of preventing homelessness and provide updates with internal departments and voluntary and community organisations;
 - Continued buy in to preventing homelessness from senior officers and local Councillors;
 - Continue to joint commission key organisations and services within the borough to respond to housing need and deliver training to tackle preventing homeless.
- 2) Actively work in partnership with voluntary sector and other local partners to address support, education, employment and training needs:
 - Continue to part fund key partners to develop support for local residents;
 - Undertake service mapping within the borough of all voluntary and community organisations and actively work, in partnership with other key partners, to reduce any gaps in service provision;
 - Develop key links and contacts with each partner organisation across the borough including voluntary and statutory organisations;
 - Representative at the Health and Wellbeing board to ensure Housing's involvement with wider challenges;
 - Consult with voluntary and statutory partners when developing or reviewing strategic or changes to policies;
 - The Council's Partnerships team continue to engage with job clubs, volunteering, training and skills opportunities for customers.
- 3) To offer a Housing Options prevention service to all customers including written advice.
- 4) To adopt a No Second Night Out model or effective local alternative.
- 5) Have housing pathways agreed with each key partner and client group that includes appropriate accommodation and support:
 - Proactively work with key partners and organisations across the borough to ensure understanding of referrals to the Housing team;
 - Maintain the Duty to Refer pathway for referrals in to the Housing team for professionals;



- Develop protocols to ensure residents leaving care (residential, hospital or prison) are provided with support to apply for housing and have a suitable offer of accommodation upon discharge/release;
- Actively engage with Hertfordshire County Council and Registered Providers to ensure the gateway in to supported accommodation is fit for purpose for residents in need;
- Provide each individual who approaches as homeless a Personal Housing Plan as set out in the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017 and ensure these are regularly reviewed with the client;
- Employment, education and training advice is available to all customers through referrals/ signposting from the Council through partner agencies such as CAB.



- 6) Develop a private rented sector offer for all client groups:
 - Review of the current private sector offers available;
 - Ensure the properties used through the scheme are of a high standard and fit for purpose for the households requiring housing within the borough;
 - Ensure the scheme falls within appropriate affordability criteria for residents.
- 7) To actively engage in preventing mortgage repossessions.
- 8) Proactive approach to preventing homelessness committed to in the Homelessness Strategy which will be reviewed annually.
- 9) Not to place any young person 16 or 17 in Bed and Breakfast accommodation.
- 10) Not to place any families with children or pregnant households in Bed and Breakfast accommodation unless in an emergency and then for no longer than 6 weeks.

