

# FAREHAM

## BOROUGH COUNCIL

### **Report to Health and Housing Policy Development and Review Panel**

**Date**                    21 July 2016

**Report of:**            Director of Operations

**Subject:**                ANNUAL REVIEW OF HOMELESSNESS STRATEGY

#### **SUMMARY**

This report sets out the progress made in delivering the Council's Homelessness and Housing Options Strategy 2014-17. The report outlines the actions identified in the strategy and provides an update on progress to date in meeting these actions.

#### **RECOMMENDATION**

That the Panel notes the progress so far in meeting the 19 actions included in the Homelessness and Housing Options Strategy 2014-17.

## INTRODUCTION

1. The current Homelessness and Housing Options Strategy covers the period 2014–2017. The original strategy sets out a 3 year plan with actions and priorities to prevent and resolve homelessness in the Borough. The strategy is required to be reviewed annually to check progress against the actions and to consider any new issues that may have arisen. This is the second review of the current strategy.

The strategy includes a total of 19 specific actions within four objectives, these being:

Objective 1	To provide advice, assistance and support to enable homeless and vulnerable households to address their housing needs and to lead independent lives.
Objective 2	Adopt sustainable initiatives that deliver housing solutions accessible to those in housing need and that minimise reliance on the use of temporary accommodation.
Objective 3	Wherever possible to prevent homelessness from occurring in Fareham by working in partnership with other statutory and independent sector agencies.
Objective 4	Monitor the demand on the service and outcomes to inform future provision and direction.

Each action is listed in Appendix A with an update on progress made to date, however some areas require greater explanation.

## OVERVIEW OF PROGRESS

2. In November 2014 the Strategic Housing section, including the Housing Options team, became subject to the Vanguard Intervention process. As a result some actions have not been progressed as originally expected. The Vanguard Intervention has changed the way the Housing Options team engages with customers in two key areas – the way we assess housing need and how we assist with securing or providing accommodation.
3. We have tried to reduce the amount of paperwork created in our efforts to help a customer with their housing problem. We no longer require customers to complete an application form to join the housing waiting list; instead all customers go through a ‘housing needs assessment’ process with a Housing Options Officer. This assessment seeks to identify the presenting and underlying housing problems so that we can work with the customer to resolve those problems. Where we find a customer needs help to move to alternative accommodation we are trying more often to ensure that the accommodation secured or provided will be available to them for as long as they require it.
4. Objective 1 includes actions to make best use of all available funds to prevent homelessness or secure alternative accommodation. The housing needs assessment process seeks to identify customers that can manage in private sector accommodation and provide a tailored solution to help the customer to achieve this option. The private rental sector in Fareham and neighbouring areas is very competitive and we are being more flexible and creative in the ways in which we work with landlords to help our customers to secure private rented accommodation. We are for example in some cases providing a loan to help customers to meet deposit or rent in advance requirements.

5. Objective 2 includes target timescales for move-on from temporary accommodation; however the Vanguard Intervention is leading to a move away from such arbitrary targets. The housing needs assessment will help us determine those customers who need more direct help from the Council and will seek to identify what sort of accommodation the customer needs. The aim is then to meet that need without requiring the customer to constantly move around just because they have been there for a certain period of time.
6. Objective 3 includes actions that involve working in partnership with other statutory and voluntary services in the local area. The Strategic Housing Service continues to fund a part-time role with the Citizens Advice Fareham office to provide specialist money advice to those customers who are threatened with homelessness as a result of rent or mortgage arrears. Since April 2014 the adviser has met with over 100 customers and around 20 customers were directly prevented from becoming homeless. Many other customers were provided with advice that enabled them to find their own solution to their housing problem or move on to more suitable accommodation.

The Rough Sleeper Outreach Worker (covering Fareham, Gosport and Havant) has historically been funded via a specific sub-regional funding stream. This funding source will cease in December 2016, however the new Hampshire County Council 'social inclusion' contract now includes a requirement for local outreach services to be provided. A new 28 hour a week dedicated outreach role covering the Fareham and Gosport area is being developed.

7. Objective 4 includes an action to monitor the impact the Allocations Policy has on homelessness and movement through temporary accommodation. As mentioned earlier, the Vanguard intervention to the Strategic Housing service has changed the way we assess a need for social housing and the way we use temporary accommodation. If a customer needs social housing we will try to identify and achieve this at an early stage and where possible avoid the need for a customer to go through multiple unnecessary moves. The Allocations Policy requires updating and will be brought to Housing and Health Policy Development Review Panel later this year.

## **RISK ASSESSMENT**

8. The Council continues to face challenges to meet the housing needs of our customers, with a number of different pressures affecting successful outcomes. As already mentioned the private rental market in Fareham is quite small and we have had to be more flexible in the way we assist customers to make this option work in some cases.

The government's welfare reform programme, in particular the introduction of Universal Credit (UC) could have an impact on the Housing Options service. The length of time it takes to process and pay a UC claim could add to the difficulty for some groups in securing private housing.

Social Housing tenants who move onto UC will for the first time receive a payment toward their housing costs (whereas previously housing benefit was paid direct to their rent accounts). There is a risk that these tenants will not actually use all or part of this payment to pay their rent and as a result they could fall into arrears and could face being evicted. This may impact upon the Housing Options service if these tenants then approach for advice and assistance.

## **CONCLUSION**

9. Good progress continues to be made in delivering the current Homelessness and Housing Options Strategy and the Council is on course to complete the majority of the actions included within the strategy. Some actions have altered slightly as a result of the Vanguard intervention and the new direction of the service.

### **Background Papers:**

Homelessness and Housing Options Strategy 2014 - 17

### **Reference Papers:**

### **Enquiries:**

For further information on this report please contact Cathy Dawes (Ext. 4498)

ACTION	INTENDED OUTCOME	PROGRESS TO DATE
<p>1a – Senior Housing Options Officer to ensure best use is made of all available funds including DHP, in the prevention of homelessness and the securing of alternative accommodation.</p>	<p>To limit the number of households becoming homeless.</p>	<p>Since the start of this strategy and up to the end of March 2016, 41 households have been assisted by the Housing Options team to secure private rented accommodation.</p> <p>In this time a further 27 households have been assisted by the Benefits team to secure private rented accommodation, using Discretionary Housing Payments.</p>
<p>1b – review the training needs of all Housing Options Officers on a regular basis to maintain knowledge and skills and to keep up to date with changes in case law and best practice.</p>	<p>Ensure customers receive a comprehensive advice service, through which they are made aware of other agencies able to give support and advice.</p>	<p>Officers have attended training on specific issues in the past year:</p> <p>Domestic abuse      Universal Credit                      Medical awareness and assessing priority need                      Understanding new Right to Rent legislation</p> <p>Officers also receive monthly updates from the National Housing Advice Service which includes information about latest case law.</p>
<p>1c – review the Housing Options website, factsheets and housing options plans.</p>	<p>Information is user friendly, current and accessible.</p>	<p>The website has been updated this year to reflect the change in the way customers are considered for council and housing association accommodation.</p> <p>Information has been added to the website about the new Right to Rent legislation.</p>
<p>1d – strive to achieve Gold Standard local challenges relevant to this objective</p>	<p>Provide an enhanced housing options service.</p>	<p>The Housing Options team offer a drop-in service, operating Monday to Friday providing a range of housing advice, focussing on preventing homelessness where possible. Advice is provided in writing where needed.</p>

<p>2a – achieve move on from TA within agreed timeframes for 70% of households in year 1 (2014/15), increasing to 90% in year 2 (2015/16)</p>	<p>Increase capacity of existing TA, resulting in fewer placements in bed and breakfast accommodation.</p>	<p>Following the Vanguard intervention, we are no longer moving customers solely on the basis of the time they have spent in a particular type of accommodation.</p> <p>However since April 2014, 141 households have moved on from temporary accommodation into social housing, private rent or made their own housing arrangements.</p> <p>In 2013/14, 59 households were placed in bed and breakfast. In 2014/15 this reduced to 53 households (this included 4 single people accommodated under Severe Weather Emergency Protocol provisions (SWEP)). In 2015/16, the placements totalled 54 (but included 9 single people accommodated under SWEP).</p> <p>The cost of using B&amp;B has reduced since the start of this strategy:</p> <p>In 2013/14 the annual cost was £84,608.34          In 2014/15 the annual cost was £70,441.18          In 2015/16 the annual cost was £62,544.02.</p>
<p>2b – monitor the success and impact of the Tenancy Support Worker, prior to the 12 month period coming to an end to determine whether to extend the post</p>	<p>Accommodation Officer released to secure more accommodation in the private rented sector.</p> <p>Rent arrears reduced in TA</p> <p>Better management and intervention around cases of anti-social behaviour</p>	<p>The Tenancy Support Worker post became vacant in Feb 2015. Post now been filled using the capacity of a Visiting Officer (from the Benefits team).</p> <p>The post holder focusses on ensuring all relevant benefits are claimed, managing debt and rent arrears, budgeting, managing</p>

		<p>the tenancy, and signposting to other support services.</p> <p>Rent arrears in temporary accommodation are generally lower than when the Tenancy Support Worker post commenced.</p>
<p>2c – launch new private rented initiatives in 2014 with the target of taking on 45 properties within the first 12 months of operation</p>	<p>Meet the future demand for temporary accommodation and minimise the use of bed and breakfast accommodation.</p>	<p>The FareLets scheme was launched on 1<sup>st</sup> July 2014; new properties completed to date:</p> <p>30 under a managed lease arrangement                  20 under the Tenant Find service                  1 under the full managed lease arrangement.</p> <p>Following the Vanguard Intervention more customers have been sourcing their own private sector accommodation and the Council has been assisting through greater flexibility in meeting the up-front costs needed to access the private rented sector.</p> <p>There has been a small reduction in the number of households placed in bed and breakfast accommodation and it remains a priority to minimise our use of this accommodation.</p>
<p>2d – purchase 8 properties using Right to Buy receipts</p>	<p>Increase available stock of temporary accommodation</p>	<p>The Council has purchased 7 properties using the ‘right to buy’ receipts.</p> <p>The Council also purchased a 4 bed house that has been used as temporary accommodation since November 2014. The property was purchased to enable a development opportunity on land to the rear</p>

		of the house.
2e – work with Housing Associations to develop new affordable housing in the borough.	Increase range of affordable housing to meet housing need in the borough.	<p>The target in our Corporate Strategy (2011 – 2017) is to enable the provision of 500 new homes by March 2017.</p> <p>Along with our housing association partners we have achieved 409 homes to date, we expect a further 74 completions by 31 March 2017, leaving a shortfall on the original target of just 17 units.</p>
2f – strive to achieve Gold Standard local challenges relevant to this objective	Provide an enhanced housing options service.	The focus of the Options and Initiatives teams is to avoid and minimise the use of bed and breakfast accommodation for all household groups. The Vanguard intervention has led to using more flexible ways to make best use of the limited private rented accommodation available in the area
3a – continue to monitor the success and outcomes of the Money Advice worker and determine whether funding is available to extend the post for the life of this strategy.	<p>Number of evictions due to rent or mortgage arrears reduced</p> <p>Homelessness prevented as a result of better money management, budgeting and awareness of benefit entitlement.</p>	<p>Since April 2014, 111 referrals have been made to the Money Adviser.</p> <p>The Adviser has successfully prevented homelessness in many cases both directly and indirectly. The Adviser has:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Attended court with owner occupiers and social housing tenants to defend repossession proceedings.</li> <li>• Assisted others to manage and settle debts to help them move on from a housing situation that is unsuitable or unsustainable.</li> <li>• Negotiated with lenders, landlords and</li> </ul>

		<p>other debtors - this helps customers to either remain in their present home or puts them in a better position to find their own alternative solution.</p>
<p>3b – monitor the success of the Rough Sleeper Outreach worker and determine whether funding can be extended beyond the 12 month Regional Rough sleeper group funding</p>	<p>Reduction in the number of rough sleepers in the borough.</p> <p>Quick engagement to prevent entrenched rough sleeping.</p> <p>Co-ordinated response to rough sleeping with police, community safety and substance misuse agencies.</p>	<p>The current role will cease in December 2016; a new 28 hour a week role has been created under the new Social Inclusion contract that will provide Outreach work in the Fareham and Gosport area.</p> <p>The number of rough sleepers in Fareham remains fairly consistent. Our annual figure for the last 3 years has been:</p> <p>2013 - 8 2014 - 8 2015 - 6</p>
<p>3c – in partnership with Children’s Services agree the future role of the Accommodation Resource Centre following the reduction in Supporting People funding.</p>	<p>Maintain the gateway agency to ensure 16 / 17 year olds are given independent advice as to their options.</p> <p>Prevent homelessness through mediation and support</p>	<p>The Accommodation Resource Centre ceased to operate as the local ‘gateway’ service following the new Hampshire County Council contracts for young people services.</p> <p>The Options team now works with representatives at the Early Help Hub or at the Childrens Services team to meet the needs of young people – especially those aged 16 and 17.</p> <p>In 2013/14, five 16-17 year olds were placed in B&amp;B. Since this strategy began, this reduced to 2 young people in 2014/15 but increased to 7 in 2015/16. The move-on outcomes for these 9 young people were:</p>

		Supported housing = 4 Transferred to children services = 1 Returned home = 1 Made own alternative arrangements = 3
3d – prepare for the impact the reduction in the Supporting People programme will have on homelessness services across the borough through the reconfiguration of services and the targeting of remaining funds to meet statutory duties.	Maintenance of as many homelessness prevention services as possible.	The Options team works with relevant Hampshire County Council teams to ensure the needs of local residents are being met by the new services such as the Mental Health, Young People and Social Inclusion contracts  Operational meetings have been set up so that we can meet regularly with Hampshire Commissioning Officers and the local service providers to monitor the contract provision.
3e – strive to achieve Gold Standard local challenges relevant to this objective	Provide an enhanced housing options service.	We work in partnership with other agencies to meet the needs of local residents by providing a range of advice, support and accommodation.
4a – continue to explore purchasing the Housing Options module from Orchard	Improved data capture and monitoring information to inform future plans and strategies.	Not currently considering this option.  During the Vanguard intervention the Options team reduced its use of all IT systems to test exactly what was needed. At the moment, the current housing options database is still believed to be the best value for money system for helping to record and monitor housing advice and homeless records.
4b – produce a business plan for the new private rented sector schemes prior to their launch.	To be able to monitor the success of the new schemes and support the case for continuing with the posts of Temporary Accommodation Co-ordinator and Tenancy	Task completed

	Support Officer	
4c – continue to monitor the impact the new Allocations Policy has on homelessness and movement through temporary accommodation.	Increased movement through temporary accommodation.	<p>No issues currently highlighted – since the start of this strategy 141 households have successfully moved on from temporary accommodation. 77% of these moves have been into social housing.</p> <p>The Allocations Policy will be reviewed during the course of 2016 and making best use of social housing stock to meet the needs of customers will be a priority.</p>
4d – strive to achieve Gold standard local challenges relevant to this objective	Provide an enhanced housing options service.	The homeless strategy is reviewed annually via report to Health and Housing Policy Development Review Panel to ensure we are able to continue to prevent and respond to the needs and issues of homeless customers.