

HOMELESSNESS REVIEW KEY MESSAGES

In order to prepare for the new Homelessness Strategy questions were posed to Housing Options Staff and Partners at the Housing Options Forum in January 2014.

This is a summary of issues raised which were taken into account in development of the draft consultation Homelessness Strategy

Positive issues – what has worked well in the last 3 years – change and achievements?

Emergency accommodation

- Good working relationship around Emergency Direct Action Beds – need to have better move on options for people using this - (Merchants Terrace)
- Emergency Housing for homeless individuals has worked really well in our experience; we've had great information from borough council housing officers, and brilliant help from Merchant's Terrace (Genesis Housing) and The Purfleet Trust to provide housing and further support
- The Benjamin Foundation (BJF) new purpose built hostel and its 12 beds. It would be good to have more to move into (agency unknown)

Good use of skills and resources

- Utilising Homelessness Prevention Fund
- IAA (Insecure Accommodation Award)
- Access to free NHAS training
- Single homelessness funding
- Empty homes funding
- Bi-lingual staff
- Use of temporary accommodation subsidies

Joint working in housing and support

- Alexandra House – Broadland Housing
- Joint work with The Purfleet Trust
- Working closely with landlords
- Phoenix House and The Oakes (run by The Purfleet Trust) in Partnership with FCH.
- Pathways to Independence Project (Purfleet Inclusion Project)
- Phoenix accommodation
- Stonham work on tenancy sustainment
- Homestay Joint work with Police and UKBA
- The Hub (BJF)

- Joint Norfolk Protocol for 16-17 year olds in light of G v Southwark – County wide.
- Significant reduction in numbers of rough sleepers from approximately 20 to 3

What hasn't worked so well?

Welfare Benefit Reform

- Benefit cap and spare room subsidy (also known as bedroom tax)
- Reduction in Housing Benefit levels especially for shared room rate and 1-bedroom rate
- Shared room rate age limit going up from 25 to 35
- Reduced number of private rented properties that fall within LHA
- Lack of access to housing for under 35s

Access to rented housing

- Insecure Awards are not as affective for people needing 2-bed accommodation, as the wait is 6-9 months on Homechoice. Most IAAs turn into homeless applications
- People losing their local connection within Homechoice Policy when they leave the area even for a short period of time

Others

- Children's Services – staffing changes, knowledge, third party referrals are an issue
- Job Centre sanctions affecting HB payments (often get stopped altogether)
- DWP decisions and time to decision
- Government policy based on theory when practical solutions are much more difficult
- Not understanding individual's needs and having too high expectations
- Exclusion
- Funding levels

Who are the excluded people with limited access to housing and associated services?

Vulnerable groups

- Difficulty finding provision for vulnerable groups
- People with severe and enduring mental health issues with higher level of support

- Not so much limited access but limited opportunities/support for those with mental health problems to accommodate successfully and understand their rights and responsibilities

Single/Young People

- Single people with mental health and undiagnosed learning difficulties
- Single people under 35 who are restricted in benefit terms, single young men especially
- Young single men
- Young/single individuals and these with intense support needs

Others

- People with high rent arrears, debts with previous landlords
- People with no local connection for Homechoice
- People who are ineligible for housing assistance and who are unaware of their entitlements
- People who are intentionally homeless
- People with substance misuse issues

What are the barriers to finding and retaining accommodation?

Demand and supply

- Demand exceeding supply
- Affordability – lack of affordable accommodation
- Lack of suitable properties in relation to existing benefit entitlement
- Lack of move on options/support finding these
- Changes in local connection criteria
- Landlords not willing to accept tenants on Housing Benefit

Household finance issues

- Financial-obtaining deposits, rent in advance, agent's fees
- Low LHA rate for private rented accommodation
- Lack of money, increasing restriction on benefits
- Threat of complete benefit withdrawal for single under 25's
- Affordability due to cuts in benefits
- Difficulty in accessing private rented sector
- Deposits and fees in the private sector are too high

Ability to manage a successful tenancy

- Lifestyle – chaotic, drug use, domestic abuse, not having the skills to maintain property such as paying bills, money management
- Friends – not understanding tenant is responsible for friend's behaviour. Feeling pressured by friends and their behaviour – mislead loyalties
- Vulnerabilities/lack of adequate support to maintain tenancies

- Budget management – debt
- poor previous history, rent arrears
- Understanding ramifications of intentionally homeless
- Retaining tenancy – lack of basic financial capacity and little or no provision for education/financial skill development
- Lack of support after moving into own tenancies
- Retaining accommodation – spare room subsidy issues, behaviour, visitors, changes in lifestyle
- Lack of support from outreach agencies. Finding other options regarding private rent/deposit and acceptance of these
- Tenants not having the right skills to manage their tenancy, to manage their finances and to prioritise
- **Others**
- Vulnerability – attitude that only people who take anti-psychotic medication are vulnerable
- Language barriers, right to reside in UK, behaviour
- Stonham - high demand for services

What are the gaps or over-provision?

Gaps

- Training, NEETS (those Not in Education, Employment or Training), young people in general
- 16-18 year olds as YMCA are now doing 18+
- Under-supply of 2-bedroom properties
- Lack of suitable accommodation (size, general and supported)
- Lack of provision for people with medical needs who are under 55
- Lack of outreach drug support – will no longer visit hostels (link worker)
- Mental health will not do emergency visits evenings and weekends
- Gaps in move on options for hostels/temporary housing
- Move on accommodation – something in the middle of hostel and own tenancy
- Sustainable options for ex-offenders beyond short-term/hostel provision which isn't suitable for all
- Housing Options team access to food bank vouchers
- Lack of provision for people with complex needs

Over-provision

- Relative over-supply of sheltered housing

What are the future opportunities or threats?

Threats:

Longer term funding especially for voluntary sector

- Lack of funding
- Reduction in funding for charitable/supporting/advising organisations
- Further cuts in Supporting People funding
- Services that are dependent on limited funds and grants are under threat
- Lack of funding for minority groups

Welfare Reform

- Welfare reform, Universal Credit, lack of localisation
- More Housing Benefit changes and reductions, spare room subsidy
- Potential impact of Universal Credit

Other

- Homelessness due to lack of provision
- More sanctions from Job Centre due to welfare reform leading to eviction
- Not having the time/or staff to help all those that require assistance

Opportunities:

- Develop good relationships with landlords
- Phoenix House/Shared House – run by Purfleet Trust – could be developed further
- Develop HMOs managed by RSLs
- Out of hours advice for young people evenings and weekends
- Develop multi-agency approach that share information and work together
- Develop the piece of land on the side of Right Tracks, could be used for lack of provision 16-18 or multi-agency move on

What are the potential solutions?

Policy changes

- Policy/legislative changes regarding vacant properties
- Flexible approach beyond policies – freedom for other partners to assist with filling gaps
- Review of DHP
- To provide more options to access private rented sector for those who struggle to access accommodation through letting agents

Partnership working

- Work more in partnership
- Have support in place ready for individuals who have a housing need.
- To continue to build good relationships with landlords

Advice and training

- Money advice to those who struggle with budgeting
- Tenancy skills training