

## **WAVERLEY BOROUGH COUNCIL**

### **CORPORATE OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY COMMITTEE - 27 JULY 2015**

#### **EXECUTIVE – 1 SEPTEMBER 2015**

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##### **Title:**

#### **HOMELESSNESS STRATEGY UPDATE: YEAR TWO**

**[Portfolio Holder: Cllr Carole King]  
[Wards Affected: All]**

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##### **Summary and purpose:**

The Council adopted its Homelessness Strategy 2013-2018 in July 2013. This report updates the Executive on the Council's progress in preventing homelessness and highlights the areas to focus on in the year ahead.

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##### **How this report relates to the Council's Corporate Priorities:**

Value for Money – Waverley has adopted a spend to save approach in preventing homelessness.

Affordable housing – Waverley's allocation scheme and the provision of affordable social housing help the Council in its work to prevent homelessness.

Understanding Residents' Needs – Waverley's housing options approach to preventing homelessness is based on understanding and responding to peoples' circumstances and needs.

##### **Financial Implications:**

Waverley's Homelessness Strategy highlights the areas where future investment of resources can best help the Council and its partners assist households under threat of homelessness

##### **Legal Implications:**

Waverley has a statutory duty to assess homeless applications and to provide housing advice to its residents under Part VII of the Housing Act 1996 (as amended)

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##### **Background**

1. The Council adopted its Homelessness Strategy 2013-2018 in July 2013. The Strategy contained a review of the services and resources currently available in the borough and surrounding areas to meet the needs of people who are homeless or threatened with homelessness, a strategy outlining the main themes and challenges for the strategy period, and an action plan to identify the key actions that need to be taken to better meet these challenges.

2. This report contains an update on key performance and statistical data relating to housing advice and homelessness in Waverley during 2014-15 and an update on the progress in achieving the year two targets.

### Key Performance and Statistical data for 2014-2015

3. 2014/15 has been one of the busiest years for new housing advice and homelessness enquiries.

09-10	10-11	11-12	12-13	13-14
884	774	879	884	950

Apr - Jun 14	Jul - Sept 14	Oct - Dec 14	Jan - Mar 15	Total
238	234	203	269	945

4. In 2014/15, the Housing Options Team has helped the majority of households threatened with homelessness to avoid becoming homeless and has kept the numbers in temporary accommodation low. Waverley continues to perform exceptionally well in comparison to other boroughs and districts in Surrey and the South East.
5. The number of homeless households in temporary accommodation in Waverley as at 31 March is set out in the table below and the number of households in temporary accommodation in Surrey is outlined in [Annexe 1](#).

2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014
80	53	28	17	5	7	2	2	1	4

30 Jun 14	30 Sept 14	31 Dec 14	31 Mar 15
4	4	3	5

6. Waverley has reported its best ever results in preventing homelessness. In 2014/15, 692 households were prevented from homelessness through advice and assistance from the Housing Options Service, Don't Lose Your Home Project, Welfare Benefits Officer (Rents Team) and Citizens Advice Waverley and are shown in the table below:

05-06	06-07	07-08	08-09	09-10	10-11	11-12	12-13	13-14	14-15
110	141	147	163	219	330	559	564	542	692

7. It is estimated that the cost of helping a homeless household to resolve their housing situation is £5,300 a year. Based on this estimate, preventing homelessness in Waverley has saved the Council about £3.46 million and helped to minimise the disruption to education, employment and support networks for these families.

### Preventing homelessness in Waverley Borough Council

8. In an area of high house prices and high housing demand, the key challenges of preventing homelessness are:

- a) Finding private rented properties that are available to rent within the Local Housing Allowance (LHA) rates for which Housing Benefit is payable
  - b) Persuading landlords and letting agents to rent their properties within the LHA rates
  - c) Negotiating with landlords and agents to rent their properties to customers who are in receipt of Housing Benefit
  - d) Accessing sufficient funds to provide financial assistance to customers in securing the properties through the Councils rent deposit bond scheme.
9. To manage these challenges, avoid using emergency bed and breakfast accommodation and cover rent in advance payments previously funded through the Local Assistance Scheme (previously crisis loans), expenditure on the Council's rent deposit bond scheme has increased. The scheme is funded primarily by the General Fund, and topped up with contributions from the Homeless Prevention Fund and the DCLG funding for single homeless households.
10. Waverley's success in preventing homelessness has been the result of adopting a wide range of housing options to offer to those threatened with homelessness. These include:
- helping people secure suitable private rented accommodation with help from the Council's deposit bond scheme.
  - security measures to enable victims of domestic abuse to safely remain in their homes
  - referring households to specialist supported housing or emergency hostels
  - helping households maximise their benefits and access specialist debt advice
  - providing support to more vulnerable clients to enable them to successfully maintain their tenancies
  - working in partnership with other agencies such as Social Services, Police, Citizens Advice Waverley, Three Counties Money Advice, South West Surrey Domestic Abuse Service etc.

### **Progress in meeting Year Two Homelessness Strategy targets**

11. Progress in meeting the year two targets set out in the Homelessness Strategy Action Plan is contained in Annexe 3. Of the 33 targets, 28 have been achieved and 5 partially achieved, which demonstrates that good progress has been made.
12. Key achievements in 2014/15 include:
- Achieved a positive audit outcome from the review of the Council's rent deposit bond scheme
  - Worked with Ethical Lettings, a social lettings agency, to help support 17 households to find suitable private sector housing within Local Housing Allowance (LHA) limits
  - Launched an online landlord resource centre to help support private landlords
  - Received excellent customer feedback on the service provided by Housing Options from returned customer satisfaction questionnaires, examples of which are shown in [Annexe 2](#).

- Secured a further £22,000 additional funding from the DCLG to extend the level of help available to households who the Council do not have a statutory duty to house under its homelessness responsibilities.
- Created a wet room in one of the temporary accommodation units to enable it to be used by disabled homeless applicants
- Secured DCLG funding of £247,000 through a partnership bid with six other Surrey Boroughs to set up a Surrey-wide Single Homeless Support Service to help single homeless clients from July 2015.
- Completed peer reviews of Woking and Guildford's homelessness and housing options advice services as part of the work towards achieving Gold Standard accreditation, helping to strengthen partnership working and sharing of best practice
- Supported 106 vulnerable households to maintain their tenancies in temporary accommodation, homelessness prevention units and private rented housing
- Leased a Council property in Farnham to Riverside Housing to provide shared accommodation for vulnerable Waverley homelessness applicants when they move on from a more intensively supported housing scheme in Guildford

### **Key actions for 2015/16**

14. The key actions for Year Three of the Homelessness Strategy are:

- Maintain the excellent work in preventing homelessness and keeping the number of homeless households having to be placed into temporary accommodation to a minimum
- Continue the work towards achieving Gold Standard accreditation. To date no local authorities have achieved this national standard, and five have achieved the Bronze Standard
- Explore ways to use social media to promote the Council's deposit bond scheme and to increase the number of landlords willing to rent a property to households in receipt of Housing Benefit
- Work with Citizens Advice Waverley in their 'Letting with Confidence' research project
- Agree Severe Weather Emergency protocol (SWEP) arrangements with neighbouring Councils and emergency hostels for winter 2015/16
- Establish a champion for rent deposit recovery to ensure the collection of outstanding rent deposit bonds and rent in advance is maximised and prioritised
- Use the outcomes of customer satisfaction surveys to inform improvements to customer service delivery
- Work in partnership with the new Surrey-wide Single Homeless Support Service being managed by the York Road Project, Woking and monitor outcomes of the new service in Waverley
- Maximise opportunities to work with statutory and voluntary partners in order to reduce costs and improve customer services
- Monitor the impact of further welfare reforms on homelessness

## Conclusion

15. Despite the high number of households presenting to the Council as threatened with homelessness, the Council has maintained its excellent performance in preventing homelessness in Waverley. It has done this by being innovative, working in partnership with other organisations and having a wide range of housing options to help those facing homelessness.

## Comments from Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Committee

16. The Committee received the report at its meeting on 27 July 2015 and recognised that two years into the Strategy, the Council had continued to maintain its excellent work in preventing homelessness. This was achieved by firstly discussing different housing options available to those threatened with homelessness. Then, by working in partnership with private sector landlords, supported housing providers and other agencies, the Council would either negotiate suitable arrangements for people to remain in their existing accommodation or help them secure alternative housing. This was seen as a challenging area of work, particularly given the high cost of housing in Waverley and surrounding areas and the low supply of social housing.
17. The Committee thanked officers for their hard work in making this a good news story, but recognised that it was an area to keep a close eye on with forthcoming challenges around the potential Government proposals to extend the Right to Buy to housing associations and require Councils to sell off its highest value properties once they become void, both of which would impact on the supply and demand issues particularly in an area like Waverley.

## Recommendation

The Executive is asked to consider the comments from the Overview and Scrutiny Committee and note the Council's progress in preventing homelessness in the borough.

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### Background Papers

There are no background papers (as defined by Section 100D(5) of the Local Government Act 1972) relating to this report.

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## Number of households in temporary accommodation in Surrey

	31 Mar 10	30 Sep 10	31 Mar 11	30 Sep 11	31 Mar 12	30 Sep 12	31 Mar 13	30 Sep 13	31 Mar 14	30 Sep 14	31 Mar 15
Elmbridge	18	20	22	24	23	37	41	34	33	32	
Epsom & Ewell	16	26	32	34	37	58	65	108	139	145	
Guildford	7	8	9	14	27	22	25	28	27	32	
Mole Valley	12	16	18	22	18	24	28	33	37	28	
Reigate & Banstead	16	20	24	44	65	90	99	95	101	122	
Runnymede	23	29	23	53	68	47	41	63	70	71	
Spelthorne	2	3	7	7	24	33	47	73	95	111	
Surrey Heath	47	48	50	49	48	52	59	59	67	53	
Tandridge	16	19	16	15	15	22	17	23	16	21	
<b>Waverley</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>5</b>
Woking	23	23	28	33	30	31	38	28	35	57	
<b>Total</b>	<b>187</b>	<b>215</b>	<b>231</b>	<b>299</b>	<b>357</b>	<b>420</b>	<b>461</b>	<b>548</b>	<b>608</b>	<b>676</b>	

Note: figures for other Councils for 31 March 2015 will not be published until the summer.

**Customer Satisfaction Survey comments 2014/15**

'Very helpful and treated respectfully. Covered all areas which really helped us see the best way forward'

'Very helpful and treated respectfully. Covered all areas which really helped us see the best way forward'

'Very good information given which I did not know about''

'Very helpful and very friendly advice service'

'It is very re-assuring to know that after paying tax for years I now get the help and support during this difficult phase of my life – I am very grateful to all the staff'

'Very satisfied with advice and understanding from advisor today'