

<b>6 October 2016</b>		<b>ITEM: 5</b>
<b>Housing -Overview &amp; Scrutiny Committee</b>		
<b>Update on the Homelessness Prevention Strategy 2015-2016</b>		
<b>Wards and communities affected:</b> All	<b>Key Decision:</b> Key	
<b>Report of:</b> Dawn Shepherd, Housing Strategy & Quality Manager, Housing		
<b>Accountable Head of Service:</b> Richard Birchett, Interim Head of Housing		
<b>Accountable Director:</b> Roger Harris, Corporate Director of Adults, Housing & Health		
<b>This report is Public</b>		

## **Executive Summary**

There is a statutory duty on every Local Authority to have a Homelessness Strategy which sets out the local authority's plans for the prevention of homelessness and for securing that sufficient accommodation and support are, or will be, available for people who become homeless or who are at risk of becoming so.

Thurrock Council adopted a 5 year Homelessness Prevention Strategy in October 2015.

An action plan was devised and a Homelessness forum set up to drive forward the action plan

The action plan has been in place for one year and this report outlines the progress to date.

### **1. Recommendation(s)**

#### **1.1 That the Committee notes the updates in the Homelessness Prevention Strategy Action Plan**

### **2. Introduction and Background**

2.1 Every Local Authority must have a Homelessness Strategy which sets out the local authority's plans for the prevention of homelessness and for securing that sufficient accommodation and support are, or will be, available for people who become homeless or who are at risk of becoming so.

The local authority must ensure that all organisations whose work can help to prevent homelessness and/or meet the needs of homeless people are involved in the strategy.

- 2.2 Following an extensive consultation period, Thurrock Council adopted a new Homelessness Prevention Strategy at a Cabinet meeting in October 2015.

The strategy covered a five year period and an initial action plan was presented to Cabinet with a commitment to monitor the action plan annually at Housing Overview & Scrutiny Committee.

Subsequently, a multi-agency homelessness Forum was set up to drive forward the actions.

- 2.3 This report provides an overview of the action plan, highlighting its progress to date. The updated plan is attached as Annex 1.

The report also provides updated statistics on homelessness within Thurrock over the past year in comparison with previous years to enable the Committee to understand the challenges currently faced by the Council.

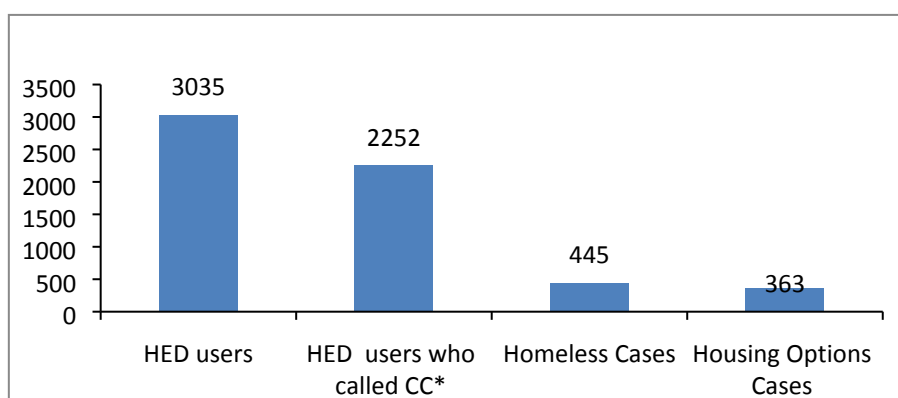
### 3. Issues, Options and Analysis of Options

#### 3.1 Homelessness in Thurrock – Key points

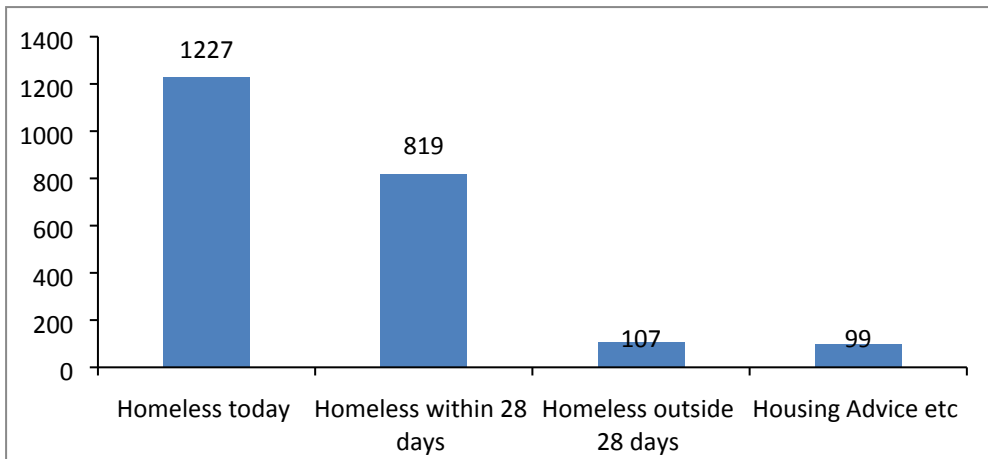
##### 3.1.1 Number of homeless approaches to the service during 2015-16

Thurrock Council operates an online assessment tool (HED) through which people access the service. Applicants indicating on the form that they are homeless are contacted by the team to offer advice and assistance, or to take a homeless application.

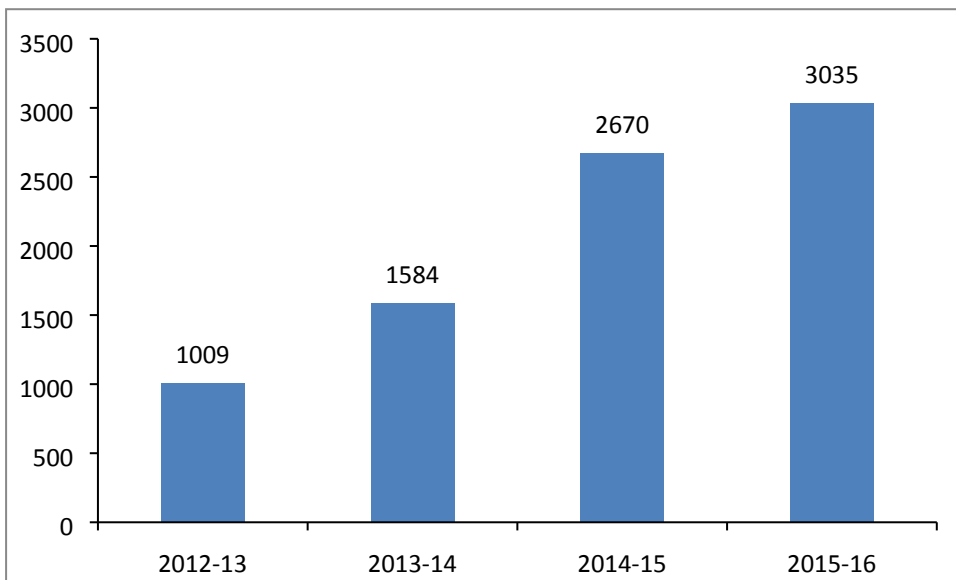
There were over 3,035 HED approaches completed throughout the year 2015-16



\*74% of the HED users call the contact centre for the following reasons:



The number of approaches to the services has continued to increase year on year; this is the picture nationally



### 3.1.2. Main causes of homelessness in Thurrock:

Reason for homelessness	2014-15	2015-16	
Eviction by parents, family or friend	42%	36%	Reduced by 6%
The ending of an Assured Short hold tenancy	33%	50%	Increased by 17%

Until 2015 eviction by parent, family or friend was the biggest reason for homelessness in Thurrock.

This changed recently when evictions from private landlords i.e. the ending of an assured short hold tenancy became the greatest reason with a large increase of 17%

This increase has also been seen nationally where the figure has risen more gradually from 11% in 2009/10 to 31% in 2015/16

Anecdotally it appears that many landlords want to either sell their properties to benefit from the increase in house prices or to enable them to re-let the properties at a higher rent to benefit from rent increases. The Council monitors this situation carefully.

London boroughs continuing to use Thurrock properties has not helped the situation due to the large incentives being offered.

The Local Housing allowance (LHA) is well below market rents making it very difficult for people in receipt of housing benefit to find affordable accommodation due to the high shortfalls

	*Average monthly rent (Grays)	Monthly LHA	Monthly Shortfall
1 Bedroom	£780	£555	£225
2 Bedroom	£964	£698	£266
3 bedroom	£1188	£816	£372
4 bedroom	£1724	£1,155	£569

\*Figure provided by Home.co.uk

The LHA has now been set for four years and therefore this shortfall could increase

### 3.1.3 Number of homeless acceptances

Where the local authority determines that a household is eligible for assistance, homeless (or threatened with homelessness in 28 days) has a priority need and is not intentionally homeless then a rehousing duty is owed to the household.

	2014 - 15	2015 - 16	increase
Homeless applications	400	448	12%
Rehousing duty owed	194	226	16%

### 3.1.4 Number of homeless preventions

Thurrock Council is committed to preventing homelessness and therefore aims to assist people to either stay in their current accommodation or move to an alternative wherever possible.

Historically the private rented sector has been used for preventions and a landlord incentive scheme is in place to assist this.

However, it has become increasingly difficult faced with the current situation in the private rented sector discussed above and subsequently the number of preventions has decreased in the past year.

### 3.1.5 Number in temporary accommodation

The number of people living in temporary accommodation fluctuates from day to day but on average there are around 80-90 people in temporary accommodation provided by Thurrock Council

The Council uses two hostels providing a total of 38 rooms – singles, doubles and family rooms. Both are managed by St Mungo’s Housing Association and offer support programmes to all residents.

In addition the council uses its own accommodation – known as furnished lets. The number varies but there are currently around 65 in place. This accommodation is used because it has become increasingly difficult to access private rented accommodation to use for temporary accommodation.

Wherever possible the Council provides accommodation in the borough; occasionally when there is no alternative, accommodation is used outside of the borough but for a very limited period of time. Thurrock compares favourably when considering the situation for other surrounding borough:

<b>Local Authority</b> (data for Q1 2016-17)	<b>Total of TA</b>	<b>Accommodated in another LA district</b>
Newham	3,956	1,522
Redbridge	2,205	915
Barking and Dagenham	1,461	289
Havering	711	59
Basildon	404	0
Castle Point	108	60
Thurrock	87	0
Southend-on-Sea*	82	0
Rochford	62	0
Brentwood	48	0

When extra accommodation is required the Council have to use bed and breakfast. This is an expensive option that is unsuitable for residents and is therefore only used when all other options have been exhausted.

The number of people accommodated in B & B has decreased in Thurrock

	2015	2016
No of households placed in B & B - March to August	82	52

Families and young people aged 16 – 17 years must not be accommodated in B & B unless there are no alternatives available, and must not spend more than 6 weeks in this type of accommodation.

	2014-15	2015-16	Increase
Average number in Temporary Accommodation	79	94	18%
Families or young people in B & B > 6 weeks	0	0	0

### 3.2 Homelessness Prevention Strategy Action Plan – update

The updated action plan is attached at Annex 1 but there have been a number of key actions which have already been completed:

#### 3.2.1 Action 30: *Housing first approach in place with working agreements for support from partner services and agencies*

Housing first is an approach to preventing persistent homelessness amongst people who are long term or recurrently homeless, with high ongoing support needs. It provides open ended support which is not conditional upon compliance with any treatment or behaviour modification.

Service users are likely to be those with severe and/or enduring mental health problems, poor physical health, learning difficulties and educational needs; they are likely to be socially marginalised and often have a history of substance abuse and offending.

Typically service users will have been in and out of various types of accommodation for many years, failing to sustain tenancies or adhere to any

pathways into housing. Usually they will have spent time in hostels, prison and sleeping rough.

It is difficult to quantify the needs in Thurrock because long term homelessness is very often hidden and not formally recorded. However, there are two groups of people who could benefit from a Housing First scheme:

- Group 1 – Rough Sleepers
- Group 2 – people with complex needs

A one year pilot scheme is being jointly funded through Housing, Adult Social Care and Public Health. St Mungo's have won the contract to provide the service for the pilot scheme and 5 service users will be assisted.

Accommodation will be provided either through Council housing stock or the private rented sector, and will consist of a studio or one bed self-contained property.

The support of other agencies is an important factor to the success of the scheme and a working protocol with partner agencies will need to be implemented to ensure ongoing priority support is achieved. The provider will be expected to work with Housing to put this into place.

A multi-agency steering group has been set up to guide the project and the co-ordinator from the Camden Council housing First scheme has been assisting with the programme set up. It is anticipated that the scheme will commence within the next few weeks.

### 3.2.2 *Action 28: Agree a working protocol with Domestic abuse support agencies with an agreed sharing data protocol. Protocol to include simplified flowchart for quick reference*

A new protocol has been agreed between Changing Pathways (formally women's aid) SERICC, Adult Social Care and Housing to provide support to those experiencing domestic abuse and/or sexual violence, who are facing homelessness as a result.

The protocol includes flow charts to enable quick reference for officers.

The protocol also provides an alternative route to homelessness for victims so that cases can be prioritised through the housing allocations process rather than going through the homelessness legislation.

The protocol was launched at a recent conference and will be available to all colleagues within the council and other partner agencies.

3.2.3 *Action 26: increase training and awareness of domestic and sexual abuse for all housing staff*

An annual training conference has been instigated – this took place in July 2016. Subjects included:

- Child exploitation
- Female Genital Mutilation
- Forced Marriage
- Modern Slavery
- Homelessness legislation
- The work of SERICC

In addition to Housing staff other council and partner agency colleagues were invited and the event was well attended.

Attendees were particularly moved to hear the story of a survivor of domestic abuse who told her own story and explained how she had been able to move on and turn her life around with the assistance of the refuge.

3.2.4 *Action 8: Re-establish a working Landlord forum*

The Private Landlord forum has been set up with the first meeting held on 18 August 2016. Around 18 landlords attended and a representative from the eastern landlords Association gave a presentation.

3.2.5 *Action 6: Increase the provision of supported housing schemes*

A house of multiple occupation (HMO) has been set up in conjunction with Children's services to assist four young people who are working as apprentices but who would otherwise have been homeless. The scheme is for young people being supported through Inspire and is proving very successful.

3.2.6 *Action 29: Develop SLAs and working protocols*

Working protocols are being set up – for example a protocol is in place with children's services for people who are found to be intentionally homeless but have children in the household. The protocol allows sufficient time for the service to carry out their statutory assessments under the Children Act whilst the person is still accommodated by the housing service. It also provides for increased professionals meetings at an early stage.

3.2.7 *Action 9: Develop incentives for Thurrock Landlords to take homeless applicants as a discharge of duty or prevention*

Officers have been working closely with private landlords and have managed to secure 48 new tenancies since the strategy was implemented in October 2015.



3.2.8 Action 31: *Homelessness forum to be set up to drive forward the action plan with identified leads for specific areas - leading on actions with regular updates*

The homelessness forum was set up in January 2016; membership of the forum includes:

Adult Social care	Housing Allocations	Southern Housing
Children's services	Local Area Coordinators	SERICC
Local Church	Mental health	Sheltered housing
Disability forum	Open Doors	Tenancy Management
Drug & Alcohol support team	Police	Thurrock Council Private Housing
Family Mosaic	Probation	Troubled Families
Business Improvement	Public Health	Welfare reform
Housing Enforcement	Regeneration	Women's aid
Housing Performance	Rent & welfare team	Young people mediation service
Housing Safeguarding	Sanctuary housing	Youth council
Housing Solutions		

The forum met on 8 February and 11 July 2016 and smaller task and finish groups have been meeting to deliver specific actions from the plan.

#### 4. **Reasons for Recommendation**

The Council has a statutory duty to implement a five year homelessness strategy in order to set out the Local Authority's plans for the prevention of homelessness, and for securing that sufficient accommodation and support are, or will be, available for people who become homeless or who are at risk of becoming so.

It is good practice to review the strategy action plan annually to ensure that it continues to meet the local needs.

#### 5. **Consultation**

Not required – this is an update only

## **6. Impact on corporate policies, priorities, performance and community impact**

The homelessness strategy action plan identifies specific areas for future work which address the corporate priorities of building pride, responsibility and respect within the home and improving health and wellbeing by preventing homelessness which can have an adverse impact.

## **7. Implications**

### **7.1 Financial**

Implications verified by: **Julie Curtis**  
**HRA and development accountant**

If homelessness numbers continues to rise there are likely to be increased costs to the service – particularly if there are increases in temporary accommodation

### **7.2 Legal**

Implications verified by: **Martin Hall**  
**Housing Solicitor / Housing Team Leader**

There are no legal implications – this is an update only

### **7.3 Diversity and Equality**

Implications verified by: **Natalie Warren**  
**Community Development & Equalities Manager**

An equality impact assessment was completed when the new strategy was implemented. The homelessness forum will monitor impacts through statistics and feedback from support providers to the group – in particular whether or not any particular group appears to be increasing in homelessness presentations. To date this has not been the case.

However, going forward figures relating to community and equality impacts will be produced on a quarterly basis, and presented to the forum, the group will review the data and put in place any necessary actions to investigate or resolve any issues that may be identified. At each quarterly forum current data will be reviewed against previous data to monitor progress taken, and any appropriate actions still required referred to the correct team, with the measure of success being no evidence of adverse impacts identified.

7.4 **Other implications** (where significant) – i.e. Staff, Health, Sustainability, Crime and Disorder)

8. **Background papers used in preparing the report** (including their location on the Council's website or identification whether any are exempt or protected by copyright):

None

9. **Appendices to the report**

- Appendix 1 – Thurrock Homelessness Prevention Strategy Action Plan

**Report Author:**

Dawn Shepherd

Housing Strategy & Quality Manager Housing, Business Improvement