

Consultation on Homelessness Prevention Strategy – February to August 2015

The consultation was undertaken in two stages

Stage one

An initial consultation was undertaken between February and April 2015

This included:

- 3 face to face sessions with Council staff and partner agencies
- An online survey for recent service users – invites were sent to 850 people and 116 (13.4%) people responded – see responses at Appendix 1

Stage two

A further consultation was undertaken between April and August 2015 involving a number of face to face feedback sessions and presentations as follows:

Subject Group	Date	time	Invitees
Presentation to Children’s Services DMT	21st April	PM	Senior managers
Presentation to Adult Services DMT	28th April	PM	Senior managers
Landlords	1st June	11am -1pm	Private Landlords Social landlords Council estate management officers Environmental Health
Minority groups	1st June	2-4pm	Trust, LGBT groups, BME groups, monitoring groups
Members	1st June	5.30 to 7pm	Thurrock elected Members
Presentation to Health & Wellbeing Strategy Board	15th June	PM	Members, Senior officers & Directors
Public health	16th June	10-12am	Public health officers, Substance misuse workers, social workers, Troubled Families
Young people	16th June	2-4pm	Education, Young people, Autism, Leaving Care
Mental health	23rd June	10-12am	SEPT, MIND, POhWER
Vulnerable people	23rd June	1-3pm	ASC, Disability, Safeguarding, Hospital team, Age
Finance	30th June	10-12am	CAB, HB, Rents private landlords
Anti-social behaviour	30th June	2-4pm	ASB officers, Offenders, Community safety, Probation, MAPPA
Presentation to Youth Cabinet	1st July	5.30pm	Young people
Domestic Abuse (DA) group	16 th July	11am -1pm	Women’s Aid/Sericc/housing Domestic Abuse team, Children’s services DA officer

An online public consultation was available for 2 months. The survey was open to everyone and advertised on the Council and the Thurrock Choice Homes websites and within the Thurrock Enquirer.

Start date	18/06/15
End date	16/08/15
Number of responses	54

The results of the 2nd on line survey can be seen at Appendix 2

Points raised at the feedback sessions - notes

- When negotiating with RP's on requirements for new development – beneficial if TDC knows income and debt information to ascertain affordability criteria those on the housing register to ensure tenancy sustainability.
- Tenure should fit needs identified on housing register- improve understanding of applicants on housing register to make sure they realise that it is not just social housing that is an option at the earliest opportunity
- To ensure tenancy sustainability – offer budgeting advice at the earliest opportunity
- Tenancy Workshops good idea; to progress this need to ensure that those who are in with a chance of moving via the housing register are identified for workshops
- Idea of offering private landlords tenancy support from TDC e.g. Estate Management / Inspection of properties – act as management agents for these properties to foster confidence in private landlords.
- Discussed the idea of under occupation for elderly home-owners – this could work but depends on area (would have to be in high value area as those in lower value properties say under £130k can sell home and be rehoused on register at the moment) perhaps think about changing policy to lower this threshold further. If this is introduced then appropriate resources will have to be allocated to support this as it will be labour intensive. Idea of converting some of the 3 bed properties we have into HMO's to help house younger people and ensure it is affordable – especially as TDC do not have a huge overcrowding problem.
- First point if achieved the outcome would be to maximise benefits and prevent homelessness – Idea to speed up the process develop on-line form to help ascertain affordability issues at the earliest opportunity and improve income for applicants. – Lead responsibility for this suggested: Financial Inclusion Team.
- Tap into Family Mosaic service
- Use Step change debt advice charity
- The group agreed that a culture change is needed – need to change from support to enforcement
- Tenancy workshops need to be timely and to those who are going to be housed
- Make sure that applicants can afford the properties they are being nominated to – make this part of the assessment process before nominating to partner landlords
- Currently TDC require 4 weeks rent paid upfront – perhaps they have gotten into debt to pay off rent arrears (Loan Sharks) – consider changing Allocations Policy so that tenants have to have maintained regular payments of rent for 6/12 months prior to being offered alternative housing.

- Discussed project currently being looked into by CHP that ensures residents who pays rent regularly is counted towards positive credit rating
 - Idea: Develop thank you for good tenants like incentive offered such as a hamper or leisure pass
 - Monitor arrears levels
 - Get the message out – develop tenancy audits to get the message out using getting to know you visits
 - Introduce mandatory training or film that helps applicants understand their responsibilities
 - Develop a film that has a “true story” theme
 - Tenancy Audit will help to identify issue
 - Hold open days
 - Good feedback regarding schools education and awareness of services
 - Members would like informative session about Housing delivered to them so that they the correct procedures
 - Very pleased with the idea about training new tenants before they sign up for housing
 - Residents should let out rooms which they are not using
 - Lonely people living on their own, with high maintenance cost – can we help these people out
 - Website does not use easy to understand language
 - Could we provide free training to landlords
 - Could we become a management function on behalf of landlords as an incentive
 - Tenants are being told by housing solutions to wait until they get a bailiffs letter before they go to council for housing help
 - Converting old building to accommodation
 - HMO – specific for young people as a first home – important especially in light of affordability and living away from parents for the first time
 - Keep victims of DV in their homes if possible
 - Promote the sanctuary scheme – definitely agree with this
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- Jim have forwarded the DV Strategy which we should link into
 - Let’s be more helpful to younger people, more supportive
 - What happens to people with no recourse to public funds
 - Prisoners – to avoid reoffending it’s important that they are housed and find employment quickly – protocol around this.
 - Gang members – loved into the area to detach from their normal setting, however this could have repercussions for Thurrock seen as a new ‘patch’.
 - Probation must be included with improved communication
 - KCA would like to be involved in the “how to be a good tenant” course.
 - Training for estate staff on alcohol/ drug misuse and how to offer simple advice.
 - Be aware that more children will be moving back in with their families or staying for longer with changes to the way benefits are paid – possibly need bigger homes
 - Add Social Services and KCA to those involved in strategic planning
 - HMO’s – need to build our own/ using our unused buildings
 - More studio flats
 - Students and “old” people living together
 - Positive response to training the tenants to be good tenants
 - Harris – include money centred training at their school
 - More awareness to the public about the impact repossession of a property could have on their life
 - Housing training for partner organisations and members
 - Respite for 18+ while mediation takes place

- Peer education programme and Super days at schools- discuss at conference
- Homelessness Forum – good idea
- Landlord Forum will improve the relationship with landlords.
- People will be asked to pay increased rent deposits with the universal credit – we need to have a strategy for this.
- Why are we knocking homes down when there is already a shortage
- More varied supported housing available
- Complex needs of resident's - need to check the environment is right for them.
- Once housed many people are more well, do to stability etc.
- Agree with housing first idea
- We should take water rates direct and not give option for paying themselves (problems with arrears)
- More 1 and 2 bed homes
- Younger people are more willing to move out of borough
- Older people need to stay with local connection
- Each area is looking in isolation
- Shelter housing required for younger groups – specifically built
- Convert existing buildings
- Repairs, rent guaranteed , direct payment, eviction management process, gas safety check all done by the council – landlord incentives
- Improved information sharing with mental health , said that the council was good with info sharing
- LAG involvement (mental health is not always the problem in isolation)
- Case conferences are important
- Increase remit for mental health forum
- Residents needs to be encouraged to downsize before their health deteriorates
- Adapt properties we have now into smaller units
- Where we have said “increase the provision of supported housing for people with Autism”, we should have older people as well, with Dual needs. They never fits into just one category.
- Definitely need a training programme for new tenants so we are discussing other options and not setting them up to fail
- Older people are leaving their partners later in life and therefore are without accommodation much later on.
- Ensure the new homes are wheelchair accessible
- Strengthen relationship between agencies and housing solutions team
- MARAC and other specialist groups should be coming to housing first, rather than an afterthought
- Banks used to go to schools and talk to them about managing money
- Malcom Taylor – Safeguarding and Inclusion Team (meets with Primary and secondary schools to talk about various issues – we may want a slot on this).
- Hostel for offenders – need to be housed without delay to avoid the cycle reoccurring
- Work with CRC – protocol not working.
- Alcohol brief intervention
- Our housing solutions need to learn more about benefits to give simple basic advice and look at status on the system.
- Develop better relations with SERRIC, Family mosaic, Grays Hall, Social Services, Probation, Hospitals, Open Door
- Mark Livermore commissions Kim Sinclair to work with PRU for a youth risk programme – we may want to tap into this as it's already set up.

- Need to have a fast track provision for those who are coming out of prison
- The action plan talked about “Increase options for home ownership e.g. equity share & low cost home ownership”. I wondered if there was any mileage in allowing homeless people to join or pool together to have more resources to access rental property, benefits etc.
- I also wondered about the local area coordinator approach and whether that sort of self-help support would work with homelessness
- Another thought occurred to me after the meeting this morning about teenage pregnancy. We commission the Family Nurse Partnership FNP which is for first time mums under 19. Would it be possible to link this up with the housing officers in terms of providing information to pregnant women under 19 who may seek housing advice. FNP work on the basis of 'notifications' rather than referrals. I could arrange for the provider to come and speak with housing officers?
In addition I thought the FNP nurses would be a group to add alongside GP and HVs in the communication section of the action plan.
- Talking to excluder
 - Mediation
 - Support workers
 - Counselling services
- Developing hostels & other supported accommodation
 - Immediate help
 - Crash pads
 - Breathing space
- Lodgings /foster care
- Support for DV victims
- Support for substance misusers
- Rehabilitation
- Mentoring by other homeless people
- Promotion of support services
- Specialist hostels
- Advertising services in youth groups/sports centres
- Education
 - Info in schools
 - Teachers being aware
 - Employment & life skills
- Hotline for homelessness
- Parent & child joint bonding sessions
- Break for parents/excluders
- Fast tracking for HB for tenants
- Promotion of downsizing for larger property tenants
- Development of modular housing
- Cooking facilities in TA – obesity levels high