

# Shelter



## Wycombe District Council Strategy Review Service

July 2019

## Contents

|   |    |
|---|----|
| Shelter Evaluation Services .....                   | 2  |
| Our Understanding of Your Requirements.....         | 4  |
| Background .....                                    | 6  |
| The Current Homelessness Strategy .....             | 10 |
| Consultation Findings .....                         | 14 |
| 2.1 Stakeholders .....                              | 14 |
| 2.2 Staff .....                                     | 16 |
| A new Homelessness Strategy .....                   | 17 |
| Recommendations.....                                | 30 |
| Understand demand and customer need .....           | 30 |
| Defining Purpose, Values and Constraints .....      | 31 |
| Partnership Working.....                            | 32 |
| Supply and Support.....                             | 33 |
| People Centred Services.....                        | 34 |
| Local Expertise .....                               | 35 |
| Action Planning .....                               | 35 |
| Appendix A: Stakeholders invited and attended ..... | 36 |
| Appendix B: Stakeholders responses .....            | 37 |
| Appendix C: Staff interviews.....                   | 43 |

## Shelter Evaluation Services

Shelter has been providing business support and consultancy services to a mainly local authority customer base since 2001. Our services are geared to work with local authorities on:

- transforming the quality, efficiency and effectiveness of support services and or housing options and homelessness assessment service delivery with a clear focus on value for money.
- providing solutions to achieve service improvement and effective service delivery across all housing services
- providing innovative tools for effective monitoring of performance
- helping customers gain a tailored and supportive service

Our services are provided by our Quality Assurance Managers who work across Shelter's national network of advice, support and specialist projects, and or freelance experts that have been recruited for their specialist knowledge and practitioner experience.

- Our business support managers and consultants come with over 10 years' experience in advice and homelessness assessment services in both the statutory and voluntary sectors and will have/had responsibility in:
  - Delivering advice and support services
  - Developing advice and support service systems and processes
  - Providing training and guidance on the delivery of services
  - Quality assurance, contract and accreditation compliance

We have worked with over 75 authorities and offer a range of standard service review tools that work equally well as a stand-alone service, or as part of a standard or tailored package. These include:

- Mystery shopping
- File reviews
- Service reviews, incorporating the review of standards, procedures, systems and processes
- Customer and stakeholder surveys
- Health checks
- Focus groups

- Benchmarking
- Performance monitoring tools and guidance

We have always valued quality over quantity, building our team to include a select number of experienced and highly respected consultants.

## Our Understanding of Your Requirements

The following brief was provided to Shelter:

- A review of Wycombe DC’s 2014-2019 homelessness strategy in terms of meeting the stated aims and actions identified.
- A consultation event with stakeholders to establish external views re effectiveness of the strategy
- A possible consultation event with staff (if not part of the stakeholders’ event) re effectiveness of the strategy
- Suggested areas of improvement and/or actions to be removed from any future strategy
- Any additional actions to be considered when delivering a new (interim\*) strategy- e.g. current government focus is on rough sleeping- suggest a rough sleeping strategy.

An interim strategy is required at this stage as a new unitary authority will be established across the whole county of Buckinghamshire post April 2020

## Our Approach

Our approach to stakeholder/partner consultations for the purposes of developing a new Homelessness Strategy covers the following areas:

|  |  |
|--|--|
| <p><b>a) Shared vision</b> – views of stakeholders need to be sought about the future direction of the service, potential and priority key outcomes.</p> <p>We seek feedback on a range of areas including what has worked well, expectations, standards of service delivery, customer feedback etc., client journey, areas for improvement, local resources and capacity</p> <p>We share key themes from any evaluation undertaken by the authority around previous</p> | <p>Partner/Stakeholder Consultations and Survey</p> <p>a. Desktop Review of relevant records (minutes of meetings and other supporting documents/ reports provided by the service.</p> <p>b. Interviews with the service manager/team (Onsite)</p> <p>c. 1- 2 Forum with select 10-15 agencies (incl. preparation)</p> |
|--|--|

|  |   |
|--|---|
| performance, local challenges and areas for development.   |   |
| <b>b) Staff views</b> – staff insights to key issues is essential for service strategy improvement and delivery. Engagement on views of the service, problem solving, innovations and ideas. Staff also to be involved in other review activity if required such as customer or partner/stakeholder forum. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. Staff interviews</li> <li>b. Team meeting</li> <li>c. Analysis of corporate staff survey but with focus on service specific issues</li> </ul> |

We also recommended a service user consultation but due to timescales and limited service user information this was not undertaken and is recommended as a key action for a future strategy.

In addition, we requested appropriate and available data to understand:

- Levels of homelessness need and demand management
- Referrals to and from the Service (including mapping local services)
- The authority's preventions work
- Management of resources

We requested any evaluation work previously undertaken by the authority relating to client journey mapping, quality and performance of services for example mystery shopping, file assessments/audits, process mapping and service improvement etc. in the last 6 – 12 months

## Background

Wycombe District Council are seeking to implement a new homelessness strategy for two reasons:

1. The current strategy was for five years from 2014-2019; and
2. The current strategy predates the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017.

Section 1(1) of the Homelessness Act 2002 provides housing authorities the power to carry out a homelessness review for their district and formulate and publish a homelessness strategy based on the results of the review. Section 1(4) requires housing authorities to publish a new homelessness strategy, based on the results of a further homelessness review, within the period of 5 years beginning with the day on which their last homelessness strategy was published (although housing authorities can conduct homelessness reviews and publish homelessness strategies more frequently if circumstances in the district change). Whilst there was an exemption from this requirement for 'excellent authorities', this regulation was revoked by the Local Audit and Accountability Act 2014 and all housing authorities are required to publish homelessness strategies as of 1 April 2017.

Wycombe District Council is a non-unitary authority, although on 1 November 2018, James Brokenshire, Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, announced his decision to establish a new single unitary district council for Buckinghamshire, to come into effect in April 2020.

As a result of the Secretary of State's decision, Wycombe District Council is seeking to implement a new homelessness strategy for a period of three years.

### **The National Picture**

The main source of Homelessness statistics in England is the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government which collate returns from local authorities.

Following implementation of the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017 on 3 April 2018, MHCLG changed the way of collecting data from local authorities on statutory homelessness. This makes it impossible to directly compare the statistics, we have focused on the statistics in January to March each year over the past 5 years to 2018, to provide a

comparison. This coincides with the previous Wycombe Homelessness Strategy, so provides a benchmark.

The main MHCLG focuses on homelessness acceptances. This is not, of course, a measure of homelessness itself, but it does demonstrate the trend. We have therefore included the annual estimate of homelessness provided by Shelter, but this is a figure for Britain as a whole rather than just England.

Historically the number of acceptances peaked in the third quarter of 2003 at 35,770 before falling to a low of 9,430 in the final quarter of 2009. Homelessness acceptances then rose in the years to 2016 (although nowhere near to the 2003 figures) but fell in the final two years.

Also included are the numbers in temporary accommodation, which have risen year on year, and the number of rough sleepers in England, which increased each year until 2018, when there was a small reduction.

|   | <b>2014</b> | <b>2015</b> | <b>2016</b> | <b>2017</b> | <b>2018</b> |
|---|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|
| Acceptances <sup>1</sup>                        | 12,540      | 13,520      | 14,780      | 14,600      | 13,320      |
| Rate in England <sup>2</sup>                    | 0.44        | 0.59        | 0.51        | 0.54        | 0.50        |
| Numbers in Temporary Accommodation <sup>3</sup> | 58,440      | 64,710      | 71,540      | 77,240      | 80,720      |
| Rough Sleeping <sup>4</sup>                     | 2,744       | 3,569       | 4,134       | 4,751       | 4,677       |
| Shelter Estimate of homelessness <sup>5</sup>   | N/A         | N/A         | 294,000     | 307,000     | 320,000     |

*Source: MCLG statutory homelessness statistics and Shelter*

<sup>1</sup> Acceptances are households that are owed a main homelessness duty to secure accommodation as a result of being unintentionally homeless and in priority need.

<sup>2</sup> The rate in England is per 1,000 households and excludes London

<sup>3</sup> Numbers in Temporary Accommodation is a snapshot of the number in temporary accommodation on 31 March in England.

<sup>4</sup> Rough Sleeping is a measure of people counted or estimated to be sleeping rough on a single night, using information collected by local authorities in England between 1 October and 30 November.

<sup>5</sup> Shelter's estimate combines the government homelessness and rough-sleeping statistics at July with data on homeless hostel bed spaces and social services provision of temporary accommodation for families in crisis across Britain.

## Wycombe District Council's Homelessness Service: Performance

Our analysis for the period April to June 18 shows Wycombe DC:

- made 108 initial decisions
- found 78 households were owed the prevention duty and 30 the relief duty.
- a further 12 households were not threatened with homelessness within 56 days.
- in the same period, the main housing duty was accepted in 15 cases.
- at the end of the quarter 90 households were in temporary accommodation, of which 75 had children. 90 households equated to 1.27 per 1000.
- 15 householders were in bed and breakfast accommodation, of whom 6 had children.
- no household with children had been in B&B for more than 6 weeks.
- a further 34 households were accommodated in hostels, of which 28 had children.

The street count of rough sleepers showed a 72% increase in rough sleepers between 2017 and 2018. Wycombe District Council has no housing stock, following a large-scale voluntary transfer to Red Kite Community Housing in 2011.

A comparison with other local authorities within the region as well as London and England shows that Wycombe are consistently performing well and are out performing English local authorities as a whole:

**Table 1: Households in Temporary Accommodation per 1,000 Households**

|               | A'bury | Chiltern | Wycombe | Sth Bucks | Milton Keynes | Reading | Hillingdon | Watford | Slough | Luton | London | England |
|---------------|--------|----------|---------|-----------|---------------|---------|------------|---------|--------|-------|--------|---------|
| <b>Sep16</b>  | 0.20   | 1.03     | 1.58    | 2.50      | 5.7           | 5.41    | 5.70       | 5.78    | 5.92   | 14.15 | 14.72  | 3.15    |
| <b>Mar 17</b> | 0.22   | 0.89     | 1.25    | 2.62      | 7.62          | 5.70    | 6.35       | 5.77    | 6..06  | 15.83 | 16.60  | 3.54    |
| <b>Sep17</b>  | 1.29   | 1.00     | 1.61    | 2.42      | 6.17          | 4.05    | 5.94       | 5.34    | 7.12   | 17.4  | 16.72  | 3.50    |
| <b>Mar 18</b> | 1.13   | 0.72     | 1.27    | 2.23      | 7.03          | 3.39    | 5.13       | 4.93    | 8.08   | 17.6  | 16.68  | 3.62    |

**Table 2: Households in Bed and Breakfast Accommodation per 1,000 households**

|               | A'bury | Chiltern | Wycombe | South Bucks | Milton Keynes | Reading | Hillingdon | Watford | Slough | Luton | Milton Keynes | London | England |
|---------------|--------|----------|---------|-------------|---------------|---------|------------|---------|--------|-------|---------------|--------|---------|
| <b>Sep-16</b> | 0      | 0.25     | 0.37    | 1.38        | 1.75          | 2.08    | 0          | 0.19    | 0.22   | 1.21  | 1.75          | 0.85   | 0.25    |
| <b>Mar-17</b> | 0      | 0.25     | 0.13    | 1.27        | 0.64          | 1.88    | 0.08       | 0.16    | 0      | 0     | 0.64          | 0.76   | 0.25    |
| <b>Sep-17</b> | 0.1    | 0.36     | 0.04    | 0.85        | 0.07          | 1       | 0          | 0.14    | 0      | 0     | 0.07          | 0.72   | 0.24    |
| <b>Mar-18</b> | 0.09   | 0.14     | 0.13    | 0.73        | 0.05          | 0.23    | 0.30       | 0.00    | 0.14   | 0.30  | 0.23          | 0.62   | 0.25    |

**Table 3: Decisions per 1,000 households**

|               | A'bury | Chiltern | Wycombe | South Bucks | Milton Keynes | Reading | Hillingdon | Watford | Slough | Luton | London | England |
|---------------|--------|----------|---------|-------------|---------------|---------|------------|---------|--------|-------|--------|---------|
| <b>Sep-16</b> | 0.77   | 0.58     | 0.87    | 1.38        | 2.59          | 2.88    | 1.03       | 1.06    | 2.52   | 4.86  | 2.44   | 1.38    |
| <b>Mar-17</b> | 0.7    | 0.97     | 0.43    | 0.88        | 1.32          | 2.08    | 1.42       | 1.28    | 2.24   | 4.43  | 2.16   | 1.32    |
| <b>Sep-17</b> | 0.71   | 0.75     | 0.85    | 1.12        | 3.73          | 1.75    | 1.32       | 1.17    | 2.4    | 3.63  | 2.33   | 1.36    |
| <b>Mar-18</b> | 0.88   | 0.50     | 0.32    | 0.88        | 2.21          | 1.08    | 1.06       | 1.17    | 2.76   | 4.58  | 1.84   | 1.2     |

## **The Current Homelessness Strategy**

The aims of the existing strategy were stated as:

**Aim 1: Continue to develop the Council's Housing Options Service**

**Aim 2: Deliver sufficient, appropriate temporary accommodation**

**Aim 3: Improve access to and increase use of the Private Rented Sector**

**Aim 4: Tackle Rough Sleeping**

**Aim 5: Bucks Home Choice Allocations Policy Review**

**Aim 6: Address the Impacts of Welfare Reforms**

**Aim 7: Reviewing Joint Working and Protocols**

**Aim 8: Social Lettings Agency**

**Aim 9: Deliver affordable settled accommodation**

The existing strategy has been progressed in a number of areas and a number of key aims have been met. Some of the targets have, perhaps inevitably, become outdated. In addition, the implementation of the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017 has led to a shift in priorities.

It is clear that in a number of areas the service functions well. There is clear evidence of innovation in service delivery and a preparedness to make changes when faced with new challenges, whether legislative or external. Specialist officers have been employed and deployed to provide advice and assistance to key groups. Despite an unexplained rise in rough sleeping, the authority has sought to respond with additional bed spaces throughout the winter and move on provision. In particular partnership working is highly developed and there is no doubt about the key contribution this makes to the prevention and relief of homelessness and in support for people either homeless or at risk of becoming homeless.

In the transition to a unitary authority on a much larger scale, care will need to be taken to ensure that this key element of working is continued and that the lessons learned locally are not lost.

Our recommendations below consider the aims and areas from the existing strategy where appropriate and areas for further development/improvement. See table below (page 14) for our further comments against each stated aim.

**Aim 1: Continue to develop the Council's Housing Options Service**

The Housing Options Service has been developed over the period of the strategy with a new staff structure. Crucially in the build up to the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017 additional staff were employed in prevention and landlord liaison. Subsequently a single persons officer has been added. There are also staff with specialist money advice and debt advice skills.

One factor that stood out in the staff consultation was that the vast majority of staff are very committed to their work. Staff morale is high and a number of members of staff discussed relishing new challenges.

### **Aim 2: Deliver sufficient, appropriate temporary accommodation**

Although the target of nil family households in B&B was missed, the numbers in B&B accommodation remain low and no families are in B&B for longer than 6 weeks. Sadly, this is not the picture nationally. In addition, no 16/17 year olds have been placed in B&B, the authority recognising this as being unsuitable accommodation. As Saunderton Lodge could not be made suitable new temporary accommodation is being developed. As a new scheme this has taken longer than the proposed upgrades but should come on stream during the next strategy.

### **Aim 3: Improve access to and increase use of the Private Rented Sector**

The Council have made good and increasing use of the private sector both in the relief of homelessness and, on a lesser scale, in the discharge of duty. A number of applicants were assisted into the private sector through the use of rent deposit guarantees.

The effective use of the private sector will clearly be a key priority in the new strategy.

### **Aim 4: Tackle Rough Sleeping**

There is a strong focus on rough sleeping using funding from MHCLG and working in partnership with the local voluntary sector. Although rough sleeping rose during the years 2014 – 2017 it did so more slowly than for the wider south east region. There was, however, an unexplained sharp increase in 2018 and the reasons for this require further investigation.

In partnership with other district councils, there is an effective outreach service and the provision of cold weather provision was greatly expanded in the last year.

#### **Aim 5: Bucks Home Choice Allocations Policy Review**

Bucks Home Choice Allocations Policy, which operates in four local housing authority areas –Aylesbury Vale, Chiltern, South Bucks and Wycombe – was updated with effect from 1 May 2014, so the target was met.

The Allocations Policy has now been reviewed and the new policy is due to be implemented by Autumn 2019. The revision has taken into account the requirements of the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017.

A key aim of the new strategy will be monitoring the implementation of the new scheme.

#### **Aim 6: Address the Impacts of Welfare Reforms**

The welfare reforms have now been implemented and there is a good understanding of the impact. The service works in partnership with the DWP and employs specialist money and debt advisors to assist people affected by the reforms. The work on understanding the impact was completed by February 2019 and the Wycombe Welfare Reform Group was disbanded.

#### **Aim 7: Reviewing Joint Working and Protocols**

There is a joint working protocol for households found intentionally homeless containing children and the councils consider it to be working well. A further protocol exists for care leavers.

#### **Aim 8: Social Lettings Agency**

The strategy contained a target to investigate the scope to create a local lettings agency. However, the conclusion was reached by the Council that this was not feasible.

#### **Aim 9: Deliver affordable settled accommodation**

The targets for the delivery of affordable or social homes have been exceeded in each year of the strategy.

### **Recommendations for the new strategy**

In developing aims and setting targets for service delivery in the new strategy it will be important to focus on outcomes which are measurable and quantifiable.

# Consultation Findings

## 2.1 Stakeholders

In the first session the stakeholders were split into mixed agency groups and asked to identify two things:

- a) Three things that the council does well in homelessness; and
- b) The main homelessness challenges in the district.

Two organisations that were unable to attend, Citizens Advice and Wycombe Women's Aid, responded by email.

All responses are collated in Appendix A

### **Things that the council does well in homelessness**

It was clear that partnership working and information sharing is very good and there were concerns expressed that this might be lost by the move to a unitary authority. However, there was a criticism of statutory services not engaging (mental health, adult care and children's services). The homelessness forum works well in its present form.

It was generally felt that the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017 had led to an improvement in the homelessness service, with improved response times.

It was also generally agreed that the council gave a high priority to homelessness and that this was at all levels of the authority, from members down.

Finally, the SWEP provision opened in November 2018 and ran until 28 February 2019. This was in addition to the voluntary sector night shelter which opened on 2<sup>nd</sup> January 2019. These two measures provided an improved service to rough sleepers and gave longer time to engage. A number of people had been housed as a result.

### **The main homelessness challenges in the district**

The main challenges fall into five main groups.

- i) Financial: LHA rates versus rents, move to Universal Credit, spare room subsidy and the lack of control of Discretionary Housing Payment in the homelessness service.
- ii) Relating to the first: the lack of affordable housing, both existing and in development.
- iii) The issue of substance misuse, particularly heroin. This was identified as the cause of homelessness, a barrier to housing and as having a major impact on the rough sleepers. It was generally felt that there was no clear plan to tackle this, which is a multi-agency problem.
- iv) Relating to support and assessments. The lack of support when people are housed; the fact that support often disappears with a move from temporary accommodation to other housing; the long delays and/or inability to obtain assessments by mental health services, adult care services and children's services, including the absence of decision makers at key meetings about complex cases.
- v) Relating to rough sleepers: the increase in numbers; the small core group with no recourse to public funds and the increasing substance misuse.

Looking to the future, two further challenge discussed were: the move to a unitary authority and BREXIT.

### **Improvements to service**

The stakeholders were asked to identify where there was room for improvement and they identified the following (which are not supported by any other evidence base):

- I. Access to the service (no wrong front door)
- II. Casework co-ordinator approach where the service user has one named point of contact who is proactive and goes with the service user to other agencies where appropriate – avoiding handoffs, signposting and referrals
- III. Survey monkey for feedback from applicants/advisors
- IV. Improve customer service by showing respect for all customers
- V. Make it easier to contact named officers by reducing times phones switched to voicemail
- VI. Shorter waiting times in the housing office
- VII. Referral to P3 (Buckinghamshire Housing Support Service) as part of PHP

- VIII. Reduce the number of empty properties
- IX. Re-provision/change use of sheltered accommodation to provide 1 bed move on
- X. Improve move on agreement for hostels and specialist supported accommodation
- XI. Provide outreach services on the streets and in hubs.
- XII. Earlier intervention to prevent repeat homelessness
- XIII. Better links with mental health services, physical health agencies, tenancy sustainment teams and multi-agency teams

## **2.2 Staff**

The staff also recognised the importance of, and the success of, partnership working. They felt that the council was good at listening, gave good advice and responded promptly to homelessness. This included looking at issues beyond housing (financial; family; mental health problems). The use of the private rented sector was identified as a success (but there were also concerns about future viability – see below).

In many respects the staff identified similar challenges, but there were some important differences. In part this was because they were considering the issue with respect to their particular role in the service, but in part it seems to reflect the statutory nature of the duties they are responsible for implementing.

Four of the six members of staff identified rough sleeping as presenting a particular challenge, noting the rise in rough sleeping recently.

There was agreement about the LHA being too low or rent levels being too high and concern was expressed about the impact of Universal Credit. The competition from London local authorities paying high incentives to local private landlord was noted. Related to this was the particular challenge of single people. A lack of support for many people housed was also identified.

Concern was expressed that the success of the private rented sector scheme may not continue given the competition from London local authorities and the roll out of Universal Credit. It was suggested that the time to pay incentives to landlords may have arrived. It was also felt that the authority could be better at encouraging partners to provide affordable housing and that planning decisions have a key role in this. There was scope for extending partnership working, building on the current success.

All staff wanted to prioritise the prevention of homelessness over relief.

It was clear that there are some very dedicated staff who are keen to improve the service and adopt creative approaches to resolving homeless. There was a feeling that the skills and specialisms of some staff is underutilised.

There was a lack of training given to staff on the homelessness strategy, although it was acknowledged as informing key performance indicators.

## **A new Homelessness Strategy**

Since the introduction of the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017, the Homelessness Code of Guidance for Local Authorities (22 Feb 2018, last updated 6 Feb 2019) provides the main guidance for housing authorities in formulating a strategy:

- Authorities are encouraged to take the opportunity to involve all relevant partners in developing a strategy that involves them in earlier identification and intervention to prevent homelessness.
- Housing authorities should ensure that it is consistent with other local plans and is developed with, and has the support of, all relevant local authority departments and partners.
- The homelessness strategy should link with other strategies and programmes that aim to address the wide range of factors that could contribute to homelessness in the local area.
- Housing authorities should consider the benefits of cross-boundary co-operation. A county-wide approach will be particularly important in non-unitary authorities, where housing and homelessness services are provided by the district authority whilst other key services, such as social services, are delivered at the county level.
- Housing authorities should ensure that their homelessness strategy is co-ordinated with the Health and Wellbeing Strategy, and that their review of homelessness informs and is informed by the Joint Strategic Needs Assessment.
- To be effective the homelessness strategy will need to be based on realistic assumptions and be developed and owned jointly with partners who will be responsible for its delivery.

- Housing authorities must consult public or local authorities, voluntary organisations or other persons as they consider appropriate before adopting or modifying a homelessness strategy.
- Housing authorities will also wish to consult with service users and specialist agencies that provide support to homeless people in the district.
- As part of the homelessness strategy housing authorities should develop effective action plans, to help ensure that the objectives set out in the homelessness strategy are achieved. Action plans could include, for example, targets, milestones and arrangements for monitoring and evaluation.

In the first stage of the required consultation for a new homelessness strategy, Shelter have undertaken two consultation exercises and the results are shared in this report. The first consultation exercise was with a range of stakeholders (voluntary and statutory sector partners) held on 1 March 2019 in Wycombe District Council offices. Some of the invited stakeholders were unable to attend. There were subsequently invited to respond to the questions posed to the Stakeholder event by email, and two responses were received.

The second was a series of staff interviews with a range of representative staff members working in the homelessness service. Six staff members were interviewed.

Other information provided and analysed included findings from the 2017 the National Practitioner Support Service (NPSS) Peer Review of Wycombe DC. We have avoided repeating the findings of this review but highlight issues that the Peer Review raised that do not appear to have been addressed. Further work is required to map the strategy against the recommendations made in the Peer Review.

In the Table below, we identify the progress of the existing strategy (based on information provided) and comments/suggestions for the next strategy/ actions:

| WDC Tasks   | Target/ Outcome  | Progress at Q4 2018/19   | Shelter Comment  |
|---|--|--|--|
| <b>Aim 1: Continue to develop the Council's Housing Options Service</b> |  |  |  |
| 1.1 Service improvements arising from the Lean Systems Review           | a) Improved service structure to be in place by April 2014;<br>b) Carry out 6 monthly reviews thereafter | a) The staff structure has been improved during the Strategy period as outlined below: | <b>Staff consultation and partner consultation indicate improvement in service delivery and new staff with good range of skills and knowledge.</b> |

|  |   |  |  |
|--|---|--|--|
|  |   | <p>i) An improved staff structure was brought in during 2014;</p> <p>ii) A new staff structure was in place from April 2016;</p> <p>iii) To meet the requirements of the HRA, a senior officer was seconded in 2017/18 and four additional posts (3 Prevention &amp; 1 Landlord Liaison) were created;</p> <p>iv) Further posts are to be added in 2019/20 - e.g. a Single Persons Officer and a post to support the work of Personal Housing Plans in accordance with the Homelessness Reduction Act (HRA) 2017.</p> <p>b) Formal 6 monthly staffing reviews were not carried out but changes to the structure were made as outlined above. These have been working well - partner agency feedback has been positive - and no further reviews were considered necessary.</p> <p>The Lean Systems Review was not productive.</p> | <p><b>Whilst reviews every 6 months are not necessary, a review is recommended of the service to evaluate the effectiveness in meeting HRA duties (file assessments, mystery shopping, client journey mapping)</b></p> |
| 1.2 Introduction of a feedback form for customers of the Housing Options service | <p>a) Feedback form to be introduced by July 2014 &amp; blank copies provided to agencies for use;</p> <p>b) Findings reviewed every 6 months and input to service improvements</p> | <p>The initial customer survey was launched in April 2016. A total of 85 replies have been received since then - not considered to be enough data on which to base a report - following evaluation.</p> <p>The online survey has now been refreshed, to seek further responses.</p>  | <p><b>It is recommended that this task is refreshed – see recommendations below for approach to customer feedback</b></p>  |
| 1.3 Increase percentage of online applications to the Housing Register           | 2012/13 baseline = 35%; target is to increase percentage year on year – report annually   | This target has been met and all housing register applications are now made online.  | <b>None.</b>   |

|   |  |  |   |
|---|--|--|---|
| 1.4 Provide officers with more opportunity to prevent & address homelessness                            | Restructure the department for more efficient use of staff time / free up officer time for casework - by Sept 2014 | The restructuring outlined in section 1.1 resulted in several additional officers, creating greater capacity for the service to prevent and relieve homelessness - in accordance with the HRA.<br><br>A review of casework is planned during 2019.   | <b>The structure has further evolved in response to the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017. As stated above an audit of casework as part of service evaluation (post April 2018 cases) is recommended.</b> |
| <b>2. Deliver sufficient, appropriate temporary accommodation</b>                                       |  |  |   |
| 2.1 Cease use of Bed and Breakfast Accommodation other than in exceptional circumstances or emergencies | Nil use of B&B for families – monitor and report quarterly   | <p>Number of family households in B&amp;B in 2016/17:<br/>End of Q1: 14<br/>End of Q2: 16<br/>End of Q3: 13<br/>End of Q4: 6</p> <p>Number of family households in B&amp;B in 2017/18:<br/>End of Q1: 11<br/>End of Q2: 24<br/>End of Q3: 13<br/>End of Q4: 9 (including 6 families. 2 single people were in B&amp;B for more than 6 weeks)</p> <p>Number of all households in B&amp;B in 018/19:<br/>End of Q1: 9 (including 4 families)<br/>End of Q2: 5 (including 1 family)<br/>End of Q3: 8 (including 2 families)<br/>End of Q4: 11 (including 7 families. 4 single people were in B&amp;B for more than 6 weeks)</p> <p>Most B&amp;B placements are made when there are no flats available in Saunderton Lodge.</p> <p>No 16/17 year olds have been placed in B&amp;B during the Strategy period to date</p> <p>Monitoring is to continue in the new Strategy</p> | <b>It is good practice to continue to monitor this. As rough sleeper numbers are increasing as is homelessness need, we would recommend this continues to be a strategic focus.</b>                     |
| 2.2 Upgrade Saunderton Lodge to improve the accommodation   | a) Report to Cabinet by April 2014;<br>b) Subject to approval, carry out improvements                              | As Saunderton Lodge could not be upgraded to meet requirements, the Council agreed to  | <b>A realistic target for completion should be included in the new strategy.</b>  |

|  |  |   |  |
|--|--|---|--|
|  | – timescale to be agreed   | <p>build a new temporary accommodation block in High Wycombe, closer to local services. As a new development, this was subject to the grant of planning permission, which was given in April 2019.</p> <p>The project now moves on to the procurement stage.</p> <p>In the interim Saunderton Lodge will continue to be used for T/A.</p>   |  |
| 2.3 Use or sell (to procure alternative temporary accommodation) the 8 WDC owned miscellaneous properties – timescales for actions being subject to approval | Actions to be progressed in accordance with Cabinet decision in November 2013 – timescale to be agreed | <p><b>The decision was made to increase the total number of homes which can be accessed, by using the capital receipts as funding subsidy for a Registered Provider to acquire properties to be let on Assured Shorthold Tenancies (ASTs) to homeless households nominated by the District Council.</b></p> <p><b>The first AST scheme with Bucks HA for 4 properties was completed in 2017/18 - to accommodate homeless households.</b></p> <p><b>A further AST scheme has been agreed with Harrow Churches HA to provide a total of 8 properties during 2019/20. Some suitable properties have already been identified.</b></p> <p><b>Not all the capital receipts have yet been allocated, offering scope for a future scheme if the above provide effective prevention.</b></p> | <b>Feedback from partner stakeholders is that this has resulted in some progress the provision of in local accommodation, particularly for women fleeing DV.</b> |
| <b>3. Improve access to and increase use of the Private Rented Sector</b>  |  |   |  |
|  | a) Hold regular Landlord Forum meetings;   | a) Landlord Forum met in June 2018 and in Feb 2019. The next one is   | <b>The need for a regular Landlord Forum should be reflected in the new strategy, with a clearer target on how</b>   |

|   |   |   |   |
|---|---|---|---|
|   | <p>b) Achieve an increased use of the private rented sector – monitor and report quarterly – WHF revised target revised of 15 per quarter</p>     | <p>scheduled for July 2019.</p> <p>b) The annual number of WDC applicants taking lets in the Private Rented Sector are listed below:</p> <p>2014/15 = 41<br/>2015/16 = 49<br/>2016/17 = 52<br/>2017/18 = 71<br/>2018/19 = 63</p> <p>WRDGS Housed 29 in Q1, 16 in Q2; 13 in Q3 and 5 in Q4.<br/>Rescued 24 tenancies in Q1, 10 in Q2; 18 in Q3 and 15 in Q4<br/>Sustained 5 in Q1, 11 in Q2. 13 in Q3 and 11 in Q4.</p>  | <p><b>often it should meet and the aim of the forum spelt out.</b></p> <p><b>Monitoring of people housed in PRS needs to continue. There are no agreed actions during the forums or link to any updated measures/performance.</b></p> <p><b>Increased use of PRS must lead to improved and effective prevention and relief particularly sustainability.</b></p> |
| <p>3.2 Discharge homelessness duty to the Private Rented Sector</p> | <p>a) Commence discharge of homelessness duty to Private Rented by Jan. 2014</p> <p>b) Increase use year to year monitor and report quarterly</p> | <p>a) Discharge of homelessness duty to Private Rented Sector (PRS) commenced in Q2 2014/15; the total for the year = 2</p> <p>b) Discharges via PRS offer in 2015/16:<br/>Total = 5</p> <p>Discharges via PRS offer in 2016/17:<br/>Total = 2</p> <p>Discharges via PRS offer in in 2017/18:<br/>Total = 4</p> <p>Discharges via PRS offer in in 2018/19:<br/>2 in Q1<br/>0 in Q2<br/>3 in Q3<br/>0 in Q4<br/>Total = 5</p> <p>PRS homes are now being used mainly for prevention and relief duties - negotiations are carried out by the Private Rented Liaison Officers who also work to sustain the tenancies.</p> <p>The condition of each property is checked in advance by Officers in the Council's Private Sector Housing team and by Housing Options Officers</p> | <p><b>The focus on the new strategy should be on relief rather than discharge of duty.</b></p> <p><b>There is a need to keep a check on any repeats homelessness and the reasons for repeat, where homelessness is relieved.</b></p>  |

|   |  |  |   |
|---|--|--|---|
|   |  |  |   |
| <b>4. Tackle Rough Sleeping</b>   |  |  |   |
| 4.1 a) Continue to gather information on people sleeping rough in the district in accordance with DCLG guidance   | a) Continue regular rough sleeper (RS) meetings;<br><br>b) Carry out an annual Street Count/ Estimate of people sleeping rough in the district | a) Meetings to discuss the issues of rough sleeping take place on a regular basis;<br>b) Annual Street Count/ Estimates of people sleeping rough in the district - verified by Homeless Link - have taken place in November each year. The figures are as follows:<br>9 in Nov. 2014<br>11 in Nov 2015<br>13 in Nov. 2016<br>14 in Nov. 2017<br>24 in Nov. 2018  | <b>The 55% increase from 2014 to 2017 is far below the increase for the South East area as a whole (Data source - Homeless Link).</b><br><br><b>The council acknowledges that there was a sharp increase in November 2018.</b><br><br><b>The reasons for this sudden increase need to be fully investigated.</b>  |
| 4.2 a) Monitor the current Outreach and NSNO for the sub-region service (including the B&B funding, emergency beds, reconnection funding and personalisation funding) - assisting rough sleepers access accommodation & support to ensure the performance is in accordance with the specifications; | Reduced incidences of rough sleeping in the Wycombe District   | The reported annual totals for the Wycombe District are as set out below:<br><br><b>Number of Referrals accepted for verification:</b><br>2014/15: 91<br>2015/16: 82<br>2016/17: 121<br>2017/18: 169<br>2018/19: 174<br><br><b>Numbers Verified:</b><br>2014/15: 56<br>2015/16: 42<br>2016/17: 40<br>2017/18: 86<br>2018/19: 87<br><br>The quarterly 2018/19 verification figures were:<br>Q1: 26; Q2: 15; Q3: 29 & Q4: 17 | <b>Although the Council and partners have been working hard to address rough sleeping (using funding from MHCLG) the number of rough sleepers has increased</b><br><br><b>Feedback from agencies is however very good. The Outreach Service provides quarterly reports - which are discussed at meetings of the Homelessness Subgroup.</b><br><br><b>Mapping of existing provision against this increased demand is needed as well as accessibility to affordable housing and relevant local support services.</b><br><br><b>Existing arrangements need to be evaluated to see if they are working or whether other service models are more likely to be effective.</b> |
| b) Review outcomes when contracts end and assess if successful  | If successful, aim to secure resources for commissioning of the services for a further period  | In partnership, the District Councils have continued to fund the Outreach Service to enable it to continue each year, including 2019/20.   | <b>The provision of outreach service should remain a target in the new strategy.</b>  |

|  |  |   |  |
|--|--|---|--|
| c) Consider options for 2015 and beyond  |  |   |  |
| 4.3 Continue to make the case for complex needs clients to access the countywide hostel services   | Increase uptake of complex needs clients from the streets of Wycombe District - monitor and report quarterly   | <p>Work to help long term rough sleepers continues via discussions between partner organisations, including people with no recourse to public funds.</p> <p>The District Council recently advertised for (and has now recruited) a Single Persons Officer</p>   | <b>To continue as part of new rough sleeper strategy in partnership with the voluntary sector.</b> |
| 4.4 a) Monitor the worklessness initiatives for individuals who have previously slept rough<br>b) Review outcomes when the current contracts end and assess if successful<br>c) Consider options for 2015 and beyond | <p>a) Clients being able to take part in training, gain skills / knowledge to be able to take employment</p> <p>b) If successful, aim to secure resources to commission the service for a further period- to be agreed</p> <p>c) If continued, monitor &amp; report at 6 monthly intervals</p> | <p>a) &amp; b) Funding for the initial scheme ended in March 2015. Due to limited resources, the Council (working in partnership with the other District Councils in Buckinghamshire) focussed on the Outreach Service - which was considered to be the main priority.</p> <p>Other initiatives have arisen and continue, including:</p> <p>* Red Kite holds a Job Club in High Wycombe every Monday morning, in conjunction with One Recovery Bucks and the Healthy Living Centre. People who attend are offered help in putting together a CV, searching and applying for jobs and obtaining help and advice from professionals regarding interview tips etc.</p> <p>* The District Council is working closely with the DWP - their job vacancies are published on a board in the Council's reception area.</p> <p>In the light of the Government's (MHCLG) Rough Sleeper Strategy 2018, this topic is to be revisited as part of the new Strategy.</p> | <b>Revisit in light of the rough sleeper strategy</b>  |
| <b>5. Bucks Home Choice Allocations Policy Review</b>  |  |   |  |

|   |   |  |  |
|---|---|--|--|
| <p>5.1 Operate an amended Bucks Home Choice Allocations Policy to reflect the local needs</p>   | <p>Subject to Member approval in Dec. 2013, amended policy in operation by April 2014</p>   | <p>In light of the Homelessness Code of Guidance, work was carried out to revise the Bucks Home Choice Allocations Policy by 2019.</p> <p>The revised Bucks Home Choice Policy has now been approved by the District Councils in Buckinghamshire and implementation is to be in place by Autumn 2019. The new policy will work in line with the Homeless Reduction Act 2017.</p>   | <p><b>The target has been met, even if the original target date was missed.</b></p> <p><b>The new strategy will need the target for implementation.</b></p>                |
| <p>5.2 Carry out an annual review of Bucks Home Choice to ensure it is meeting the needs</p>  | <p>Review annually and report findings</p>  | <p>Lettings are reported on an annual basis to the government. They are also monitored internally and are to be provided to the Homelessness subgroup on a quarterly basis.</p>  | <p><b>As a new Allocations Policy is being implemented monitoring will be a key objective, to ensure that the policy meets the needs of the homelessness strategy.</b></p> |
| <p><b>6. Address the Impacts of Welfare Reforms</b></p>   |   |  |  |
| <p>6.1 Gain an understanding of the housing impacts of the various Welfare Reform changes &amp; attend the Bucks Network Welfare Reform Task &amp; Finish Group</p> | <p>a) Carry out detailed analysis of people affected by the various elements of Welfare Reform &amp; identify the implications;</p> <p>b) Work with Registered Providers, agencies and private sector landlords to address issues</p> | <p>a) &amp; b) Following the announcement of the Government's Welfare Reforms (in particular the changes to housing benefit) it was realised that there was a need to gain an understanding of the potential impacts.</p> <p>In April 2013, officers from Registered Providers in the area, other local agencies/ organisations with a direct interest in the impact of welfare forms on housing issues, including the DWP and the District Council, set up the Wycombe Welfare Reform Group (WWRG).</p> <p>The purpose of the Group was to help mitigate the negative effects of welfare reforms on local housing providers - by providing a forum where members could share information regarding welfare reforms/ Universal Credit and to discuss issues of</p> | <p><b>The target has been met.</b></p>   |

|   |  |  |  |
|---|--|--|--|
|   |  | <p>concern. This included inviting speakers, identifying ideas for good practice and considering ways of working together.</p> <p>Regular meetings took place, with the DWP having a standing item to share the recent information they had available. Registered Providers carried out assessments of their clients who were likely to be affected. The meetings were well attended and were agreed as being very useful - helping the various organisations work together to help clients.</p> <p>Over time, the DWP established a county-wide Stakeholder group, with regular meetings and circulated updates. In February 2019 the members of the Wycombe Welfare Reform Group agreed that the purposes for establishing the group had been met and that opportunities for all organisations to continue to work together were now provided via the established Bucks-wide Stakeholder meetings. The WWRG was therefore brought to an end.</p> <p>The Bucks-wide Stakeholder meetings continue on a regular basis. WDC officers attend and also have additional meetings with the DWP outside of the Stakeholder meetings.</p> |  |
| <p>6.2 Under-Occupation Deduction –</p> <p>a) Raise awareness of DHP assistance and opportunity for move / exchange</p> <p>b) Assist households needing to downsize by making effective use of transfer</p> | <p>a) Prepare suitable publicity material and distribute – also update the Council's website – by January 2014</p> <p>b) Monitor the numbers of households</p> | <p>a) The approach of customer self-service is established; with information and advice / links being available on the Bucks Home Choice website</p> <p>b) Numbers of households downsizing via CBL transfer:</p>  | <p><b>The website explains why downsizing is a good idea, states that priority is given for downsizing and provides relevant links. The target is met.</b></p> |

|   |  |  |  |
|---|--|--|--|
| opportunities via Bucks Home Choice<br>c) Work with HB team to ensure a consistent message is sent from the Council encouraging the seeking of early assistance | downsizing via Bucks Home Choice<br>c) Regular engagement of officers from the two teams and reporting of actions  | Total: 20 in 2014/15<br>Total: 15 in 2017/18<br>Total: 27 in 2016/17<br>Total: 19 in 2017/18<br>Total: 14 in 2018/19<br>c) The Housing Service Manager meets regularly with the Council's HB managers  |  |
| 6.3 Universal Credit – raise awareness and be able to inform & advise households - aiming to avoid debts and rent arrears                                       | a) Raise awareness of UC & basic bank accounts<br><br>b) Staff training as to exemptions etc.<br><br>c) Make IT facilities available at WDC<br><br>d) Monitor the impacts of UC, respond with actions if possible and keep under review<br>Timescales to be agreed - based on Govt. timetable  | a) The UC Full Service has operated in the Wycombe area since Sept. 2018. The Stakeholder meetings continue to discuss UC.<br><br>b) Housing Service staff training on Welfare Reforms has been carried out<br><br>c) Up to 7 terminals are available at the WDC Customer Service Centre<br><br>d) UC is still causing delays in some rent payments  | <b>The new strategy will need to address the continuing roll out of Universal Credit and evaluate the impact, particularly on rent arrears.</b><br><br><b>It should also be a focus for the landlord forum and the new landlord liaison post.</b>  |
| 6.4 Benefit Cap – Provide targeted advice and assistance to those affected by the benefit cap before it causes homelessness                                     | a) Contact to be made with the affected households to offer support & access to resources<br><br>b) Provide additional training for front line staff<br><br>c) Regular liaison between the HB and Housing Options teams regarding the affected households and regular meetings with Jobcentre+ | a) Working with the households, advice is given on looking for alternative accommodation, how to come off the benefit cap - including getting into employment etc. HB is involved - sometimes using DHP to pay off arrears;<br>b) Staff training on welfare reforms has been carried out;<br>c) Day to day cases are dealt with by HB officers, including the HB officer dedicated for helping the Housing Options team. The DWP Stakeholder meetings are held regularly | <b>The council also has specialist money advisors within the homelessness service.</b><br><br><b>Case File Assessments/Audit can evaluate how well advice and assistance has been provided to prevent homelessness. Will also measure effectiveness of staff training</b><br><br><b>Service User Consultation can be used to households impacted</b><br><br><b>Feedback from DWP/JCP and HB team</b> |
| 6.5 LHA- Investigate the local effect of the 30th percentile  | Consider options for local market research - details to be agreed  | In June 2015 it was agreed to delete this target because the issue had by then been superseded   |  |
| 6.6 Shared Accommodation Rate (SAR) – maximise opportunities for  | Seek opportunities with RPs and the PRS - in partnership with stakeholders – Detailed  | Nominations are provided for residents of the Old Tea Warehouse and the YMCA in High   | <b>A credit union has also been set up.</b>  |

|   |   |  |   |
|---|---|--|---|
| hostel move-on accommodation  | actions and timescales to be agreed   | Wycombe, to help them move on.<br>In addition to the residents of the Old Tea Warehouse being exempt from Shared Accommodation Rate, residents of the YMCA are now also exempt<br><br>A workshop session to discuss potential for working with a credit union - as a place to save and a potential source of affordable credit - is to be considered | <b>Determine if this still needs to continue under the new strategy.</b>  |
| <b>7. Reviewing Joint Working and Protocols</b>   |   |  |   |
| 7.1 Continue to prioritise homelessness services  | Continue to work with organisations to provide services and referrals for clients by targeting resources for training, networking, funding etc. | Homelessness services continue to be a priority; the Protocol for intentionally homeless families with children was signed by WDC & by Bucks CC - and it is working  | <b>The protocol was updated in February 2018. Targets and measures (as agreed with partner organisations) need to be monitored.</b>   |
| 7.2 Monitor the impacts of the recently agreed protocol for 16/17-year olds across the county | Quarterly monitoring and reporting  | A Protocol with Bucks County Council was signed in October 2015. Social Care senior managers have advised that this is working well, with no recent issues. There is also a Protocol between Bucks CC and the four District Councils in Buckinghamshire regarding care leavers   | <b>In January 2018 Ofsted judged Bucks CC as inadequate for overall effectiveness. The most recent visit was in May 2019 and reported that Bucks CC has made steady progress in improving the quality of intervention when children are first referred to the multi-agency safeguarding hub.</b><br><br><b>Whilst there appears to be no issues, monitoring is important.</b> |
| <b>8. Social Lettings Agency</b>  |   |  |   |
| 8.1 Investigate the scope to create a local social lettings agency                            | Recommendation to Cabinet by September 2015   | This was considered but the conclusion reached that it was not feasible and it was agreed to delete this target  |   |
| <b>9. Deliver affordable settled accommodation</b>  |   |  |   |
| 9.1 Work with Registered Providers to develop additional affordable / social housing          | a) Deliver affordable / social housing in line with annual targets;<br><br>Quarterly monitoring and reporting                                   | a) The number of Affordable /Social homes delivered each financial year:<br>Total in 2014/15: 80<br>Total in 2015/16: 22<br>Total in 2016/17: 48<br>Total in 2017/18: 69   | <b>This target has been met.</b><br><br><b>However, it remains a key priority needs to continue as part of the ongoing strategy</b>   |

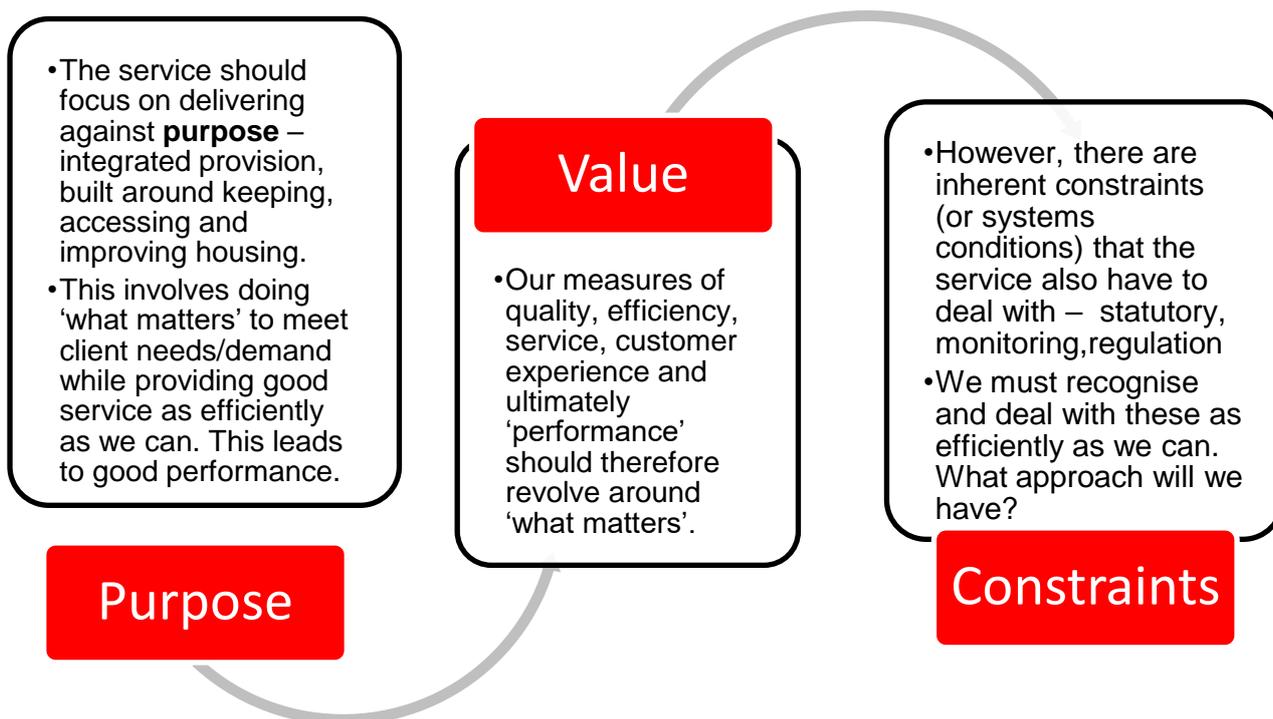
|  |   |  |  |
|--|---|--|--|
|  |   | Total in 2018/19: 197<br>(including 110 Extra<br>Care)   |  |
|  | b) Work with Bucks CC<br>to assist in the provision<br>of appropriate<br>supported housing<br>accommodation | b)(i) The focus has<br>been on the Hughenden<br>Garden Village Extra-<br>Care development of<br>260 flats, including 110<br>affordable. The scheme<br>completed & opened in<br>Spring 2018<br>(ii) Bucks CC produced<br>a Market Position<br>Statement for Housing<br>and Accommodation.<br>No specific project<br>outcomes to date but a<br>workshop held and will<br>be further meetings | <b>Update needed on progress<br/>and next steps and this work<br/>will continue to be<br/>developed in a future<br/>strategy action plan</b> |

## Recommendations

### Understand demand and customer need

1. A fresh evaluation is required of the reasons why people are approaching as homeless and for housing advice, both directly to the local authority and through other stakeholders. A multi-agency data mapping exercise should be undertaken to identify underlying causes and reasons for seeking help. Where gaps exist in current data, the authority and other stakeholders can gather intelligence by undertaking information directly at first point of contact for example listening to calls, observing face to face drops in etc. (approx. 4-6 week) to obtain a real time understanding of reason for presenting (as well as the effectiveness of the handling by the authority and organisations)
2. There is a need to evaluate the prevention and relief work undertaken by the authority, to examine the precise steps that are being undertaken with a variety of applicants and identify where improvements can be made. This can be achieved by client mapping of closed case records and/or mapping of case mapping from first point of contact through to case closure of new cases/approaches. The new strategy will need to add the additional duties (as considered in the HRA Action Plan) and in particular the principles and ethos of the legislation. The new strategy should build on the work started, explaining how the plan has worked so far and how the authority plans to enhance its approach during the next phase of embedding the changes (what has worked well so far, what can be improved across the systems and processes, the focus of the people doing the work (staff and partner organisations) etc.
3. All repeat contacts and homelessness applications should be examined so that consideration can be given as to why approaches for repeat help are being made and what steps need to put in place to prevent repeat homelessness.
4. The NPSS recommendation that the strategy supports the development of housing pathways for each relevant client group, based on a clear understanding of local needs and provision needs to be implemented.

## Defining Purpose, Values and Constraints



1. Most strategies state a future vision to prevent and end homelessness for all. It is recommended the new strategy defines the agreed 'Purpose' of the Housing Solutions Service which requires looking at wider issues impacting housing need and understanding what matters to people seeking housing or homelessness need. The purpose should be agreed with staff, partner stakeholders and service users, in the context of adhering to the authority's statutory duties but with the aim of achieving long term solutions.
2. The new strategy should seek to identify the values and measures by which the service will seek to achieve quality, efficiency and improve customer experience and help meet customer needs
3. It is important the strategy recognises the constraints the authority needs to deal with including structural issues lack of supply, impact of welfare reform etc.

## Partnership Working

1. The Code of Guidance recommends involving all relevant partners in developing a strategy that involves them in earlier identification and intervention to prevent homelessness and we recommend this can be achieved by a multi-agency mapping of a customer journey – end to end having identified the core customer demand groups (family relationship breakdown, private rented tenancy issues, evictions, affordability etc.). The authority has established good partnership working and the next step is to build on the local multi agency knowledge, expertise, resources to provide a more integrated service. It will also be necessary to map out exactly what role each stakeholder can play in providing advice, preventing homelessness, relieving homelessness, providing accommodation (both interim and longer term) and providing support to households when housed (both temporally and longer term). This could be done through the use of a targeted questionnaire. Gaps in service provision can then be identified (and any unnecessary overlapping addressed).
2. In implementing a new strategy, it is very important that existing good practice is built upon. There is an overwhelming feeling that partnership working is very successful locally and this needs to form the foundation of the new homelessness strategy. It was however notable that some key stakeholders did not attend or participate, in particular the food bank and the YMCA. Engaging these organisations in the consultation process and involving them in future partnership working is a priority.
3. The past minutes of the homelessness forum and rough sleeper group should be revisited and the action points considered to identify what actions have been completed and what are outstanding.
4. The role and purpose of the landlord forum needs to be clearly identified. The meetings need to define action points and state who is responsible for each action. Consultation should be undertaken with local landlords and agents on what would encourage them to let properties to or via the Council.

5. Partnership working is much less successful when it comes to other statutory agencies. Long delays in obtaining assessments under the Children Act, the Care Act and for mental health were identified. Indeed, there was a general feeling of failings on the part of the County Council. It is essential that key decision makers from those services participate in the homelessness forum and other partnership working groups.

## **Supply and Support**

5. A rethinking of the strategy towards the private sector taking into account the challenges which will be present over the next three years (in particular the roll out of Universal Credit and increased competition) is needed. What is the estimated need in the future and what are the risks (other accommodation needs, out of area placements from London authorities, PRS stock purchases by other authorities etc.)
6. A new support strategy aimed at tenancy sustainment and preventing recurring homelessness is a key priority.
7. Further measures to create affordable and social housing will be needed, working both in partnership with key stakeholders and by creative use of planning decisions (recognising that work has begun here with the proposed construction of new temporary accommodation for families). The change of use of sheltered accommodation for use by the homelessness service should be considered.
8. A multi-agency approach is required to tackle the issue of substance misuse, particularly the influx of heroin. The new strategy should consider what new policies are needed, are any current policies impacting negatively on this client group?
9. A key issue is rough sleepers, both prevention and tackling a core group with no recourse to public funds. The strategy needs to address measures to tackle this core group and ensure that they are accommodated and helped into employment. As noted above the MCHLG deadline for 2019 is for all authorities to rebadge their strategies as homelessness and rough sleeping strategies.
10. The strategy must address the provision of advice to the vulnerable groups identified in s179(2) of the Housing Act 1996.

## People Centred Services

11. Improvements need to be made to the customer service experience across all client groups (particularly those that present less well or unable to articulate their needs clearly). Training needs to be provided to newer staff members (including temporary staff) on dealing with particular vulnerable groups (those identified in s179(2) Housing Act 1996 and rough sleepers).
12. Waiting times to be seen on the day need to be reduced. Where an applicant is accompanied by a staff member from a stakeholder they should be either given priority or an appointment, to ensure the effective use of time by all concerned.
13. The strategy needs to address mortgage repossessions (previously highlighted by NPSS) and information on mortgage arrears needs to be included on the website.
14. A range of accessible tools to allow easy feedback needs to be created, both for stakeholders to provide feedback and for applicants to provide feedback.
15. Develop the website to provide advice and tools for the prevention and reduction of homelessness. The front page of the website contains no mention of housing or homelessness (save for housing benefit) and the website only contains details of how to contact the Housing Options Service.
16. Research is required to further identify where and how early prevention can be delivered, with the aim of intervening before people are legally threatened with homelessness.
17. Outreach working needs to be developed, so as to engage with potential service users at an earlier stage to maximise opportunities to both prevent homelessness and to prevent people sleeping rough.
18. As well as engaging missing stakeholders, the consultation on the new strategy needs to include service users. Our recommendation is that this is through a focussed co-production team or forum event rather than survey monkey or online feedback. Questions should be targeted around understanding what matters to them, how well their housing and support needs are being met, how accessible and

effective the service is etc. We would be happy to provide further details on service user involvement led reviews.

## **Local Expertise**

19. The expertise of members of staff in key areas beyond immediate homelessness (e.g. money advice) should be built upon and utilised to the full. Staff should be incentivised to suggest service improvements and create new services and partnerships.
20. When a new homelessness strategy is adopted training should be given to all staff on the contents of the strategy and their role in implementation. This training should also be included in the induction training for all new staff in the homelessness service.
21. Measures must also be put in place to disseminate the key messages of the homelessness strategy, to other council teams and departments, the voluntary sector and other statutory sector bodies, in particular the county council.
22. The new strategy needs to link with other local strategies and programmes (health, & wellbeing, education, employment) and where appropriate should identify any opportunities from neighbouring authorities (cross boundary co-operation)

## **Action Planning**

The authority should continue with an action planned approach to the strategy and must keep this updated quarterly – this did take place however some gaps have been identified in progress. In the future these action plans must be published annually with progress and updates.

## Appendix A: Stakeholders invited and attended

|     | <b>Name</b>        | <b>Organisation</b>      | <b>Attended</b>             |
|-----|--------------------|--------------------------|-----------------------------|
| 1.  | James Boulton      | Wyc. Homeless Connection | Yes                         |
| 2.  | Nick Adkins        | ASB (WDC)                | Yes                         |
| 3.  | Azra Khan          | CMHT                     | Yes                         |
| 4.  | Fiona Hall         | P3                       | Yes                         |
| 5.  | Kath Palmer        | BCC Commissioning Team   | Yes                         |
| 6.  | Rory Allan         | PCSO                     | Yes                         |
| 7.  | Louise McGuinness  | Connection Support       | Yes                         |
| 8.  | Liz Bubbear        | Connections Support      | Yes                         |
| 9.  | Phil Thomas        | WRDGS                    | Yes                         |
| 10. | Rachel Davies      | CDC/SBDC                 | Yes                         |
| 11. | Sonia Crawford     | AVDC                     | Yes                         |
| 12. | Jonathan Radcliffe | Red Kite Group           | Yes                         |
| 13. | Chris Martin       | Housing Solutions        | Yes                         |
| 14. | Nick Brake         | Bucks HA                 | Yes                         |
| 15. | Rajesh Shah        | DWP                      | Yes                         |
| 16. | Lydia Pardoe       | Riverside Old Tea Rooms  | Yes                         |
| 17. | Andrea McGibbin    | Bucks Mind               | Yes                         |
| 18. | Sara               | Wycombe Women's Aid      | No (but responded by email) |
| 19. | Alasdair Turner    | Citizens Advice          | No (but responded by email) |
| 20. | Michaela Clark     | OTW                      | No                          |

|     |                 |   |    |
|-----|-----------------|---|----|
| 21. | Barbara Gray    | OTW   | No |
| 22. | Janine Thomas   | DWP   | No |
| 23. | Mark Day        | ORB   | No |
| 24. | Andrew Evans    | BCC Commissioning Team                                      | No |
| 25. | Delia Holmes    | BFIS  | No |
| 26. | Michael Veryard | CDC/SBDC  | No |
| 27. | Rohini Patkar   | BCC social care   | No |
| 28. | Simon Kearey    | NHS   | No |
| 29. | Holly Harrow    | Homes England   | No |
| 30. | Jon Crellin     | Thompson Wilson   | No |
| 31. | Claire Hawkes   | BCC   | No |
| 32. | Jayne Evanson   | YMCA  | No |
| 33. |                 | Christians Against Poverty who run High Wycombe Debt Centre | No |
| 34. |                 | One Can Trust, who run the foodbank                         | No |

## Appendix B: Stakeholders responses

| Task                         | Response   |
|------------------------------|--|
| 3 things that are done well. | Partnership working and information sharing<br>Extended Severe Weather Emergency Protocol (SWEP) this winter<br>Homelessness is given a high priority across all levels (including at member level)<br>Delivery of permanent housing, with good dialogue with planning<br>Rough sleeper initiative and outreach service<br>Quick response time to homelessness<br>Homelessness Forum |

|                                  |  |
|----------------------------------|--|
|                                  | <p>Person based approach</p> <p>An empathetic and supportive approach to women fleeing DV</p> <p>Identifying support needs beyond housing.</p> <p>A good understanding of the impacts to housing &amp; homelessness caused by the Welfare Reforms</p>  |
| <p>Identified key challenges</p> | <p>The proposed transition to a Bucks unitary authority (particular concern was expressed that this may lead to a loss of the partnership working)</p> <p>Lack of genuinely affordable housing (this was identified by all number of groups, some felt that the issue was more acute with 1 beds, single people and large families)</p> <p>London boroughs placing homeless households in area</p> <p>The roll out of UC</p> <p>Support for former rough sleepers at start on tenancy</p> <p>Early intervention</p> <p>The most entrenched rough sleepers, particularly with mental health issues and/or no recourse to public funds</p> <p>Rent arrears with housing providers (not just due to UC/LHA rates)</p> <p>Barriers for access to mental health services when service users placed outside county</p> <p>Lack of assertive mental health services when service users (in county) who don't engage</p> <p>More support needed for complex mental health and substance misuse issues (the issue of substance misuse came up in 3 out of the 4 groups)</p> <p>LHA rate too low</p> <p>The need for a permanent housing pathway for rough sleepers</p> <p>BREXIT (i.e. eligibility, recourse to public funds and impact on sleeping rough)</p> <p>Lack of move on from supported housing</p> <p>Access to help with rent arrears, including through DHP (which needs to be better targeted at homelessness)</p> |

|  |  |
|--|--|
|  | <p>prevention - it was noted that things had improved with DHP, but some felt it would be better if the homelessness service could make decisions on DHP)</p> <p>Lack of homelessness pathways</p> <p>Lack of specialised supported housing</p> <p>At meetings on individual cases, decision makers from Children's/Adults Services and MH services not present</p> <p>Lack of family sized housing</p> <p>Need for education in schools and to young people and housing and homelessness</p> <p>Long waiting list for mental health and adult care assessments</p> <p>Austerity</p> <p>The impact of substance misuse on homeless/rough sleeping – both as cause and effect and a barrier to rehousing</p> <p>Housing options/availability</p> <p>Planning department restricts supply (this was from the group including Red Kite, but there was no consensus about this)</p> <p>Tenancy support</p> <p>Lack of UK wide drug and homelessness policy</p> <p>Benefit cap (3 beds)</p> <p>Use of agency staff</p> <p>The provision of in borough T/A</p> |
|--|--|

In the second session the groups and asked to identify what good service means to them and their service users and to suggest improvements.

|                     |   |
|---------------------|---|
| <p>Good service</p> | <p>No wrong front door</p> <p>Client led</p> <p>Empathetic, polite and positive response</p> <p>Listening and understanding</p> <p>Treating all service uses with respect</p> <p>A consistent approach across all staff</p> |
|---------------------|---|

|              |  |
|--------------|--|
|              | <p>One named contact (to build rapport, chase progress, define escalation points and attend places with service user)</p> <p>One stop shop</p> <p>Appropriate referrals with appropriate expectation setting</p> <p>Clear structure between LA and other services</p> <p>Well resourced, up to date and knowledgeable</p> <p>Better promotion of services, including through the use of social media aimed at different groups (i.e. recognising that young people use this as their prime source of information, but are more likely to use Instagram etc.)</p> <p>Innovative/ creative solutions</p> <p>Helpful and respectful staff</p> <p>Being dealt with in a timely and efficient way</p>   |
| Improvements | <p>Casework co-ordinator approach where the service user has one named point of contact who is proactive and goes with the service user to other agencies where appropriate</p> <p>Survey monkey for feedback from applicants/advisors</p> <p>Improve customer service by showing respect for all customers</p> <p>Make it easier to contact named officers by reducing times phones switched to voicemail</p> <p>Shorter waiting times in housing office</p> <p>Referral to P3 (Buckinghamshire Housing Support Service) as part of PHP</p> <p>Reduce the number of empty properties</p> <p>Re-provision/change use of sheltered accommodation to provide 1 bed move on</p> <p>Improve move on agreement for hostels and specialist supported accommodation</p> <p>Provide outreach services on the streets and in hubs.</p> <p>Earlier intervention to prevent repeat homelessness</p> <p>Better links with mental health services, physical health agencies, tenancy sustainment teams and multi-agency teams</p> |

|  |   |
|--|---|
|  | <p>Need a consistent approach from all staff including temporary staff, both in respect of DV and wider response to homelessness</p> <p>Staff could shadow staff of other organisations (e.g. Women's Aid)</p> <p>To encourage a better understanding of the needs and issues faced by marginalised and vulnerable people / community groups; including individuals who are facing exclusion and people who are leaving /or have left prison. Also, to provide help (e.g. access to funding) to support agencies who are working with these groups.</p> |
|--|---|

In the final session participants were asked to identify what their organisation could offer in terms on Advice, Prevention of homelessness, Relief of homelessness and Support.

| <b>Organisation</b> | <b>Advice (s179)</b>  |
|---------------------|---|
| Connection Support  | Advice, prevention (ending in May)  |
| WHC                 | Drop in sessions Mon-Fri<br>Legal advice (with Hillingdon Law Centre)<br>General housing advice<br>Benefit advice (entitlement and claiming)<br>Help obtaining ID |
| BCC                 | Advice to families and young people<br>Signposting  |
| AVDC/CDC & SBDC     | Cross county consistency moving towards unitary authority<br>Alignment<br>Sharing best practice   |
| WRDGS               | Advice on securing private sector housing<br>Benefit entitlement<br>Signposting   |
| WWA                 | Advice to women experiencing domestic abuse and homeless as a result  |
| <b>Organisation</b> | <b>Prevention</b>   |
| Police service      | Engage with support workers at supported housing associations and deliver advice to clients   |

|                     |   |
|---------------------|---|
|                     | Notify support workers of people who will become homeless in near future  |
| WHC                 | Housing crisis intervention<br>Accompaniment to court<br>Financial assistance<br>Collaboration with WRDGS and Hillingdon Law Centre on legal drop-in<br>Help to get DHP and HB reconsiderations<br>Liaison with landlords to ensure tenancy runs smoothly |
| DWP/Job Centre      | Benefits<br>Labour market<br>Employment support<br>Homelessness Referrals (under duty to refer)   |
| Bucks Housing       | Support to existing tenants:<br>Welfare benefits<br>Tenancy sustainment   |
| Connection Support  | Prevention issues (ends in May)<br>Overcoming isolation<br>Intensive tenancy support for ex-rough sleepers  |
| AVDC/CDC & SBDC     | Non-public body referrals<br>Early prevention (As care)   |
| <b>Organisation</b> | <b>Relief</b>   |
| WRDGS               | House clients who are NPN or IH   |
| Old Tea Warehouse   | House clients with medium or high needs in supported accommodation  |
| BCC                 | House NRTPF homelessness families (with children)<br>Under joint protocol assess 16-17 years olds under s20 and accommodate<br>House vulnerable adults who are eligible under Care Act  |
| Bucks Housing       | Provide T/A   |
| WHC                 | Financial support for rent in advance<br>Night shelter<br>Referrals to accommodation providers  |
| DWP/Jobcentre       | Benefits<br>Labour market   |

|                     |  |
|---------------------|--|
|                     | Employment support<br>Skills provisioning  |
| AVDC/CDC & SBDC     | High need appropriately supported accommodation  |
| Police              | Engage with rough sleepers, gather information and pass to relevant agencies<br>Attend RSCG fortnightly meetings   |
| Connection Support  | Supported accommodation for young people<br>Accommodation for substance misusers in recovery<br>Accommodation for offenders<br>Outreach for rough sleepers |
| <b>Organisation</b> | <b>Support</b>   |
| Connection Support  | Support in accommodation<br>Intensive tenancy support for ex-rough sleepers  |
| AVDC/CDC & SBDC     | Shared commissioning/funding bids cross county   |
| Bucks Housing       | Welfare benefit support<br>Tenancy sustainment<br>Welfare fund   |
| Old Tea Warehouse   | Supported housing to prepare for independent living and skills in maintaining tenancies  |
| WHC                 | Accompaniment to meetings<br>Showers & laundry<br>Emergency clothing   |
| WRDGS               | Ongoing support for every AST they arrange, including maintenance of benefit claims and landlord liaison   |
| DWP/Jobcentre       | Employment support   |
| BCC                 | Look at current support funding for tenancy sustainment and hostels – can we meet needs better?  |
| WWA                 | Support for women experiencing domestic abuse and homeless as a result.  |

## Appendix C: Staff interviews

Individual written reports provided separately