

Royal Borough Windsor & Maidenhead

Homelessness Strategy 2017-2022

Building a borough for everyone
Working to prevent and reduce homelessness

“Building a borough for everyone – where residents and businesses grow, with opportunities for all.”

Our vision is underpinned by six priorities:

Healthy, skilled and independent residents

Growing economy, affordable housing

Safe and vibrant communities

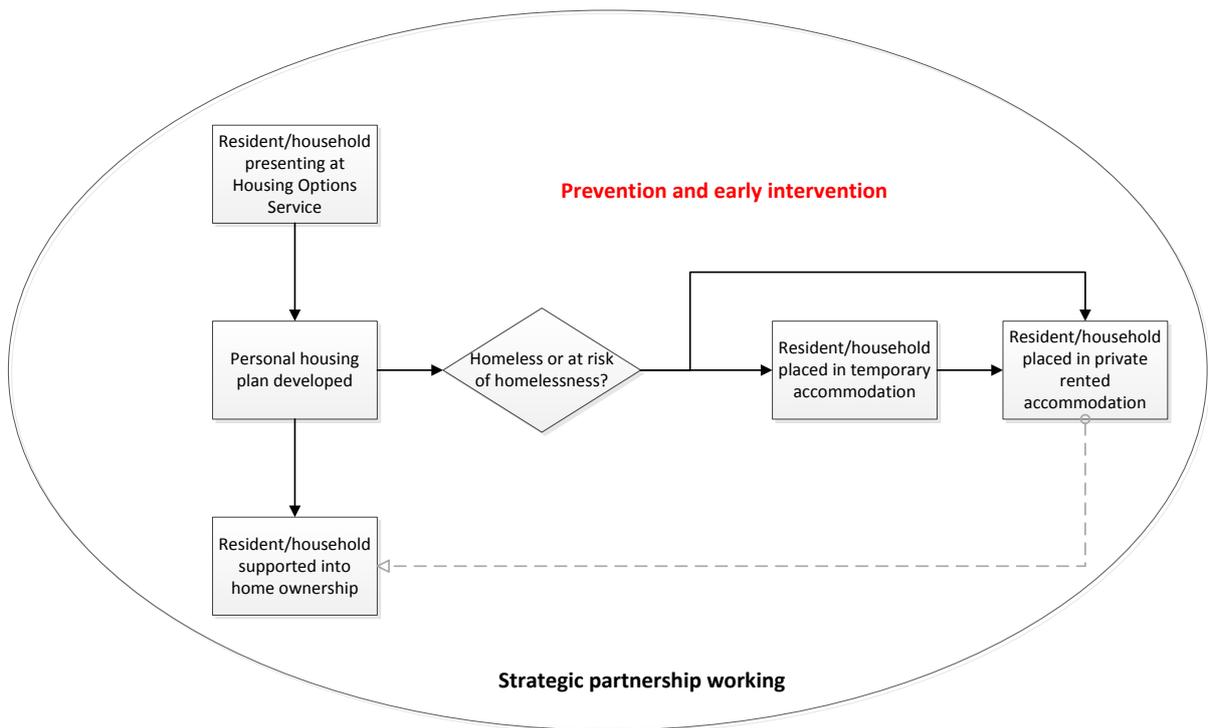
Attractive and well-connected borough

An excellent customer experience

Well-managed resources delivering value for money

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FOREWORD FROM THE LEADER OF THE COUNCIL AND DEPUTY LEAD MEMBER FOR POLICY AND AFFORDABLE HOUSING

The Royal Borough has high aspirations for its residents. We want to support all our residents to own their own home. Our emerging Borough Local Plan confirms our commitment to affordable housing and we are investing in services to support residents towards that goal of home ownership.

However, we know that over the last few years, an increasing number of households have sought advice from us around housing. The numbers in temporary accommodation has increased, as has the number of homeless households.

That is why prevention and early intervention is a key priority for this council in order to move residents into stable affordable housing and ultimately home ownership.

Homelessness can lead families and single people into a cycle that can have a profound effect on health, emotional wellbeing and the life chances of those who experience it. These effects, especially on children, can be life long and can cause repeated homelessness of a generational nature. This is why we must all do what we can to prevent it happening and mitigate its effects on the residents of our borough.

The challenge is significant; we must be proactive in working with our partners to intervene early and prevent homelessness wherever possible. We remain ambitious in our vision and know that we have very experienced skilled and innovative agencies within local partnerships that will rise to this challenge.

There is a strong desire to tackle homelessness and reduce its impact on our residents. Our vision for tackling homelessness is straightforward:

“We will maximise every opportunity to prevent and reduce homelessness in the borough”

The Royal Borough is strongly committed to this vision, and is realistic about the challenges that we face in trying to achieve this. This strategy is the blueprint for our ongoing, collaborative work in this area with our partners and our community.

Cllr Simon Dudley
Leader of the Council and Chairman of
Cabinet (including Housing)



Cllr Ross McWilliams
Deputy Lead Member for Policy and
Affordable Housing



1 INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 The Royal Borough's vision is to build a borough for everyone. Through its new strategic priority: Growing economy, affordable housing, the Royal Borough seeks to foster a dynamic and growing local economy, creating jobs and opportunities to enable residents to pursue the aspiration of home ownership.
- 1.2 In the context of that overarching vision, this strategy sets out the Royal Borough's approach to delivering homelessness services over the next five years, in relation to the national and local policy context and building on an evidence base that considers trends in the housing market and related areas. A delivery plan, see Appendix 1, sets out how these objectives will be achieved, working in close collaboration with partners in the statutory, voluntary and private sectors.
- 1.3 The emerging Borough Local Plan will help to address the issues around supply of housing in the long term, including the provision of new affordable housing. The Royal Borough's strategy is to provide opportunities to realise residents' aspirations and help them into home ownership, making effective transitions from rented housing to affordable housing. This strategy will be set out in the Supplementary Planning Document that will follow adoption of the Borough Local Plan.
- 1.4 The council has a statutory responsibility to publish a Homelessness Strategy under Sections 1-3 of the Homelessness Act 2002 and this must include a review of homelessness in the area.

2 LEGISLATIVE AND NATIONAL POLICY FRAMEWORK

- 2.1 Since the last Housing Strategy was published, there have been substantial revisions to housing and planning legislation, building on the Homelessness Act 2002.
- 2.2 The Welfare Reform and Work Act 2016 introduced a 1% rent reduction each year on social housing rents for four years. This reduction has had a significant impact on housing associations, affecting their business plans and their ability to develop affordable rented housing in particular. The capping of social rents forms part of the wider policy of reducing the national welfare budget that includes:
 - Benefit cap to be reduced to £20,000 per household.
 - Restrictions on housing benefits for under-21 year olds.
 - Single room rates for under 35 year olds.
 - Roll out of full Universal Credit service.
- 2.3 In February 2017, a new Housing White Paper was launched as well as the new Homelessness Reduction Act. The Act refocuses front line housing services on prevention rather than intervention at crisis. The White Paper promotes a mixed housing model, reintroducing support for delivery of affordable rent and considering new approaches to meeting housing demand.
- 2.4 The private rented sector has played an increasing role in housing those in need and as such forms an important part of this strategy. The Localism Act 2011 included a power for local housing authorities to discharge the main homelessness duty by way of a private rented sector offer of at least 12 months.

3 LOCAL CONTEXT AND KEY ACHIEVEMENTS

- 3.1 The evidence base supporting this strategy is set out in the Strategic Housing Market Assessment (SHMA) published by GL Hearn in February 2016. This report underpins the policy contained in the emerging Borough Local Plan and the data has been further refreshed by information provided by the Housing Options Team in January 2017.
- 3.2 The SHMA report identified significant affordability pressures in the borough with median costs of market housing on average around ten times the equivalent earnings. Analysis of income levels suggested that 61.4% of households in the borough were unable to afford market housing in 2013. House price growth continues to impact on affordability with the average house price rising by almost £30,000 since the SHMA report in 2016¹.

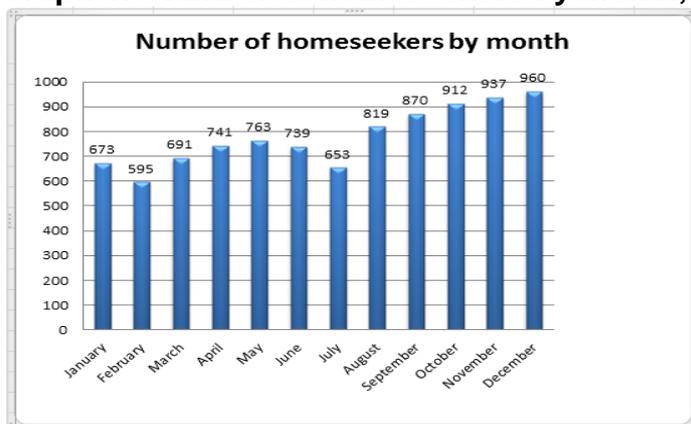
The Royal Borough

- 3.3 As a unitary authority, the Royal Borough is responsible for all areas of local government and over 140,000 residents living in over 66,000 properties.
- 3.4 The borough covers 79 square miles with the main towns of Ascot, Maidenhead and Windsor, surrounded by 14 villages, linked by the River Thames. It is just 12 miles to the west of London and has a thriving business economy. As well as providing excellent quality open and leisure spaces as well as access to a large number of unspoiled rural areas, including 1,000 acres of National Trust land and 4,800 acres owned by the Crown, the borough is also home to Windsor Castle which attracts millions of visitors every year from across the world.
- 3.5 Transport links are excellent, with four major motorways, Heathrow and Gatwick Airports close by and four main line railway stations. The Elizabeth line (Crossrail) is due to arrive in 2019, increasing connectivity even further.

Housing need

- 3.6 The Royal Borough provides a variety of housing services to residents from housing the homeless to providing strategic leadership for housing delivery. In 2016, 9,353 approaches were made to the council for assistance with housing needs, see graph 1.

Graph 1: Number of homeseekers by month, 2016



¹ Office of National Statistics, House Price Index for: Windsor and Maidenhead

3.7 In the same year, 1,518 households were prevented from becoming homeless, see diagram 1. The highest need was from single parent females, followed by single males and couples with children. This household composition is reflected in the level of need for two bedroom properties, which stood at 59% of applicants in January 2017. The majority of applicants had come from living with parents or relatives that could no longer accommodate them. The second biggest factor was the loss of private sector accommodation followed by relationship breakdown, see diagram 2.

Diagram 1: Level of homelessness acceptances, 2016-2017

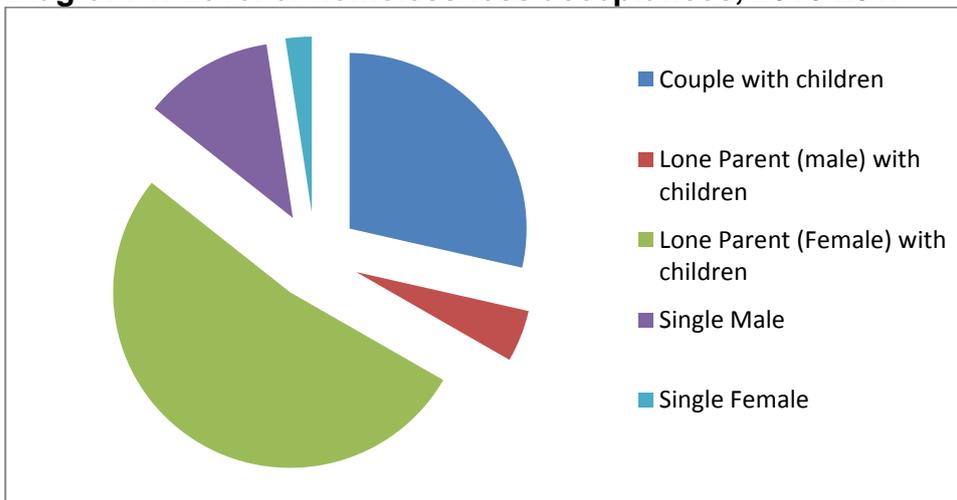
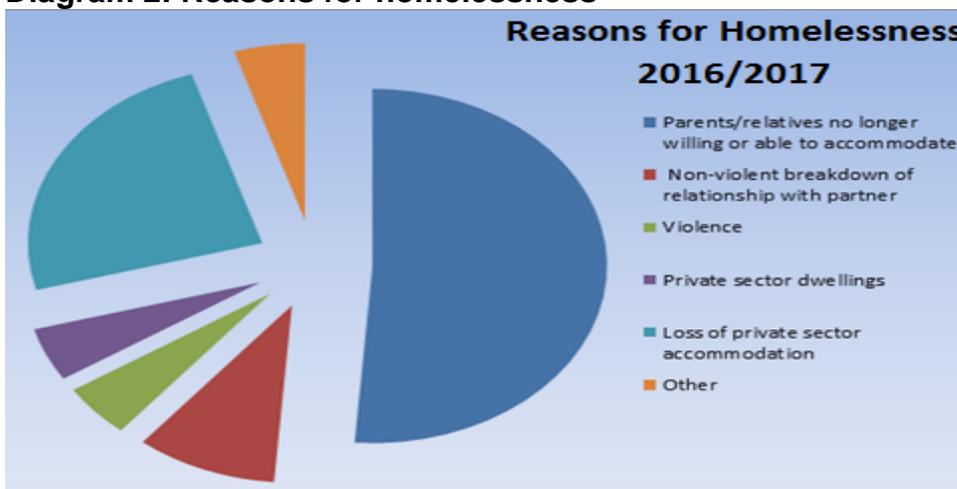


Diagram 2: Reasons for homelessness



3.8 During the year January 2016 to December 2016, 640 applicants were accepted onto the housing register. The register is prioritised through a selection of bands:

- Band A – Urgent requirement to move with the greatest housing need (Reasonable Preference AND Additional Preference).
- Band B – Requirement to move with a lesser housing need (Reasonable Preference OR Additional Preference).
- Band C – Desire to Move.
- Other – Includes applicants without a housing preference band but those which may still be eligible for housing opportunities such as key workers, those interested in sheltered housing, shared ownership or employees of the Ministry of Defence.

- 3.9 At January 2017, there were 341 applicants on the housing register, see table 1 for distribution of applicants by priority banding and table 2 for demand by applicants with a priority housing need by bedroom size.

Table 1: Number of applicants per band on the housing register, January 2017

Band	A	B	C	Other	Total
Number of applicants	15	135	117	74	341

Table 2: Bedroom needs of applicants allocated a priority housing band

Bedroom need	Band A	Band B	Total	%
1 Bedroom	6	19	25	17
2 Bedroom	5	84	89	59
3 Bedroom	4	25	29	19
4 Bedroom	0	7	7	5
Total	15	135	150	100

- 3.10 The Royal Borough continues to focus on meeting the needs of all residents for housing assistance and providing a person centred service that works with applicants to meet their specific needs. A range of housing options, including supported, sheltered and extra care housing, is already provided and this provision is continuously reviewed and developed to ensure it remains relevant and delivers the expected quality.
- 3.11 Effective partnership working is key to maximising available resources, alongside providing services that develop resilience within communities and individual households to help them find solutions where the council and its partners cannot provide them.

Key developments

- 3.12 As part of the drive to deliver improvements in homelessness provision for residents, the Royal Borough has implemented a range of new initiatives, see table 3.

Table 3: New housing provision and initiatives

Provision	Description
John West House – Homeless Shelter	John West House has been refurbished to provide eight hostel places for homeless people from the borough. Look Ahead manage the day-to-day operations providing year round support.
Braywick Lodge, Maidenhead	Braywick Lodge is an existing Council building that has been refurbished to provide four “move on” rooms.
Windsor Homeless Project housing surgery	The Housing Options Team provides a weekly drop in housing surgery at the Windsor Homeless Project, delivering housing advice and options services directly to residents.
Debt management services in connection with the Citizens Advice Bureau	The Royal Borough commissions a debt advice and management service from the Citizens Advice Bureau (CAB). The service is available to all residents who wish to seek help on money matters. In 2016, the service was successful in getting £260,084 of debt written-off and £289,314 worth of payments re-scheduled.

Provision	Description
Exchange House	13 new self contained temporary accommodation homes delivered July 2017.
Empty homes review	A review of empty properties is being carried out to identify properties that could be made available for private rent. 14 empty properties have been brought back into use so far (August 2017).

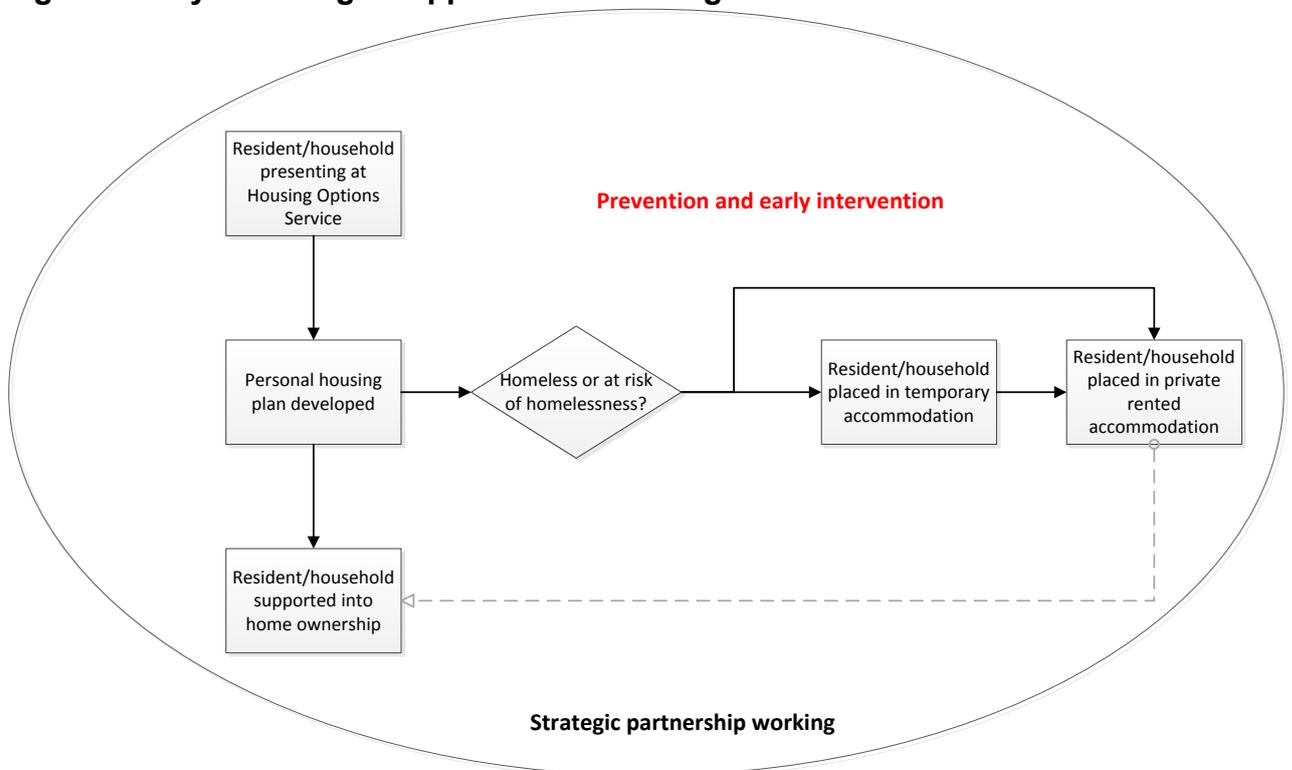
4 VISION

4.1 Within the Royal Borough's overall aspiration for home ownership for all residents, the vision for its Homelessness Strategy is to:

Maximise every opportunity to prevent and reduce homelessness in the borough

4.2 The Royal Borough's overall approach aims to support and encourage mobility: movement within and between tenures appropriate to changing housing requirements, and life stage. The aim is to support residents to move through housing tenures, increasing their stability and supporting them to the goal of home ownership. This will be achieved through policies and service frameworks that allow residents to maximise employment opportunities and improve financial well-being, which will support them to realise their ambitions for home ownership, see figure 1.

Figure 1: Royal Borough's approach to housing and homelessness



4.3 The successful provision of these services requires collaborative working with local public, private and voluntary services. To support this, the Royal Borough will actively engage with its partners in the development and delivery of services and encourage collaborative working where cross cutting responsibilities are present.

4.4 The delivery of this strategy will be measured against a set of priority outcomes which are set out in the delivery plan, see Appendix 1.

Gold standard housing and homelessness

4.5 In 2013, the government announced a new Gold Standard intended to improve frontline housing and homelessness services with a view to increasing opportunities for early intervention and prevention of homelessness. The Gold Standard sets the bar for excellent local homelessness services, ensuring that homelessness remains

the last possible option, the Royal Borough is committed to completing the 10 challenges to secure the Standard:

1. Adopt a corporate commitment to prevent homelessness which has buy in across all local authority services
2. Actively work in partnership with voluntary sector and other local partners to address support, education, employment and training needs
3. Offer a Housing Options prevention service, including written advice, to all clients
4. Adopt a No Second Night Out model or an effective local alternative
5. Have housing pathways agreed or in development with each key partner and client group that includes appropriate accommodation and support
6. Develop a suitable private rented sector offer for all client groups, including advice and support to both clients and landlords
7. Actively engage in preventing mortgage repossessions including through the Mortgage Rescue Scheme
8. Have a homelessness strategy which sets out a proactive approach to preventing homelessness and is reviewed annually so that it is responsive to emerging needs
9. Not place any young person aged 16 or 17 in Bed and Breakfast accommodation
10. Not place any families in Bed and Breakfast accommodation unless in an emergency and then for no longer than 6 weeks

5 PREVENTING AND REDUCING HOMELESSNESS

Priority outcomes

- ✓ Enhance homeless prevention services to meet the requirements in the Homelessness Reduction Act.
- ✓ Reduce the numbers of households who are in temporary accommodation or rough sleeping.
- ✓ Produce a new allocations policy by December 2017 to ensure policies support delivery of the objectives in this strategy.
- ✓ Use nominations and partnership working to enable social mobility, supporting residents to move to more suitable accommodation and make best use of stock.

5.1 This Strategy and its four priority outcomes are ambitious, yet realistic, in acknowledging the challenges of homelessness and the difficult choices that the Royal Borough has to make in the current climate. It is the Royal Borough's corporate commitment to achieve the Gold Standard and builds on the existing good work between the Royal Borough and its partners with, in some areas, a reshaped focus and emphasis to reflect changed circumstances. Early intervention, prevention of housing crisis and improved supply and cost effective use of more permanent accommodation are the top priorities.

5.2 The Homelessness Reduction Act 2017 brings about a cultural shift in the way help is provided to people who are facing homelessness, by refocusing efforts on prevention instead of intervening at the point of crisis. The approach of the Royal Borough is to treat each request individually, using a matrix approach to draw in relevant services and professionals to provide a tailor made housing service that supports the household based on their specific needs.

Priority outcome 1: Enhance homeless prevention services to meet the requirements in the Homelessness Reduction Act.

5.3 The Royal Borough seeks to meet the needs of all residents, promoting a balanced and sustainable approach. The vast majority of people are able to find and maintain their own home; however, there are still a significant number of residents who need help and support to access accommodation. Early intervention and prevention for the Royal Borough means more focus on outreach work, working with and through voluntary and community organisations to reach people in difficulty before they experience crisis. Sustaining existing tenancies remains a high priority.

5.4 The Royal Borough will focus on self-help, and supporting people who can help themselves to do so. Residents are treated as individuals, offering targeted and appropriate advice and support depending on need and circumstances which will be captured in a personal housing plan. Those households that can afford alternatives to affordable housing will be supported in accessing a private sector home. Those affected by welfare benefits changes will be offered holistic support, including assistance with employment, training and financial management.

Priority outcome 2: Reduce the numbers of households who are in temporary accommodation or rough sleeping

5.5 The Royal Borough has a high number of households in temporary accommodation, many of them in unsuitable bed and breakfast placements. There is a focus on re-

housing those who have been in bed and breakfast accommodation the longest, into a better quality and better value self contained temporary housing option. To this end, Exchange House in Maidenhead was commissioned which provides a range of various bedroom sized properties.

- 5.6 The Royal Borough's overall aim is to reduce the use of expensive short term bed and breakfast accommodation by moving homeless families into self contained temporary housing whilst at the same time significantly increasing the supply of private rented accommodation. This means continuing to building on the strong relationships with existing and new landlord partners. Increasing the availability of private sector properties will secure longer term stability for families and reduce the cost of expensive temporary accommodation. In order to deliver this ambition, a new post was created in June 2017, on an invest to save basis, to focus on delivering rented accommodation in the private sector.
- 5.7 Homelessness applications and acceptances have continued to increase in recent years and there is a continued reliance on high levels of temporary accommodation. The Royal Borough is committed to addressing the causes and effects of homelessness, offering appropriate support and solutions to affected households while minimising reliance on temporary accommodation.
- 5.8 One of the areas highlighted by the government as an area of concern is the number of people who become homeless more than once. Effective partnership working with local housing associations in the borough means an early warning system is in place where any tenancy is in jeopardy and there is a commitment to joint working to prevent any potential homelessness.
- 5.9 In line with its commitment to achieve the Gold Standard, the Royal Borough has adopted the five standards of No Second Night Out (NSNO)²:
- 1) **New rough sleepers can be identified and helped off the streets immediately** – The Royal Borough carries out an annual rough sleeper count which is based on a single night snapshot of the number of people sleeping on the streets in the local authority area, carried out between 1 October and 30 November. It then takes action to help those identified back into secure and sustainable housing.
 - 2) **The public can alert services if they see anyone sleeping rough so they get help** – the Royal Borough now delivers its Housing Options Service from library service hubs in Ascot, Maidenhead and Windsor with extended opening hours.
 - 3) **Rough sleepers can go to a place of safety, where their needs can be assessed and they can get help** – John West Housing provides emergency accommodation for rough sleepers and also a support service provided by Look Ahead Housing Association.
 - 4) **Rough sleepers are able to get emergency accommodation and other services they need** – addressing rough sleeping requires a joint approach with all agencies to deliver a coordinated approach of emergency help, including the provision at John West House and contributions from voluntary providers. In addition, weekly Housing Options surgeries continue to be run at various locations across the borough.
 - 5) **Rough sleepers from outside their area can be reconnected with their community** – the Housing Options Service provides reconnection services where the applicant has no local connection.

² HM Government, 2011: [Vision to end rough sleeping: No Second Night Out nationwide](#)

Priority outcome 3: Produce a new allocations policy by December 2017 to ensure policies support delivery of the objectives in this strategy

- 5.10 The current Allocations Policy runs until 2018 and will be refreshed following adoption of this Strategy. It sets out in detail who is eligible for housing and how applicants can apply and access housing. Housing is allocated through a housing need system where all applicants are placed in bands according to their needs, see point 3.9. There are a range of categories through which points for housing need are awarded, including a bedroom deficiency, sharing accommodation, lack of facilities or notice to quit. There are rules around the refusal of a housing offer, which include being removed from the list if two reasonable offers are refused.
- 5.11 Additional preference can be given to those experiencing harassment, social or environmental problems and those who have changes in their medical condition that mean that their current housing is no longer suitable.
- 5.12 The Household Cavalry Regiment is permanently based at Combermere Barracks in Windsor and the Royal Borough is committed to supporting members of the regiment with their housing needs. The Royal Borough is also home to two barracks and the Royal Borough will continue support service personnel with their housing needs, including providing a Housing Options surgery at Broom Farm estate in Windsor. Members of the Armed Forces do not require a local connection to apply for social housing and this inclusion is written into the Allocations Policy.

Priority outcome 4: Use nominations and partnership working to enable social mobility, supporting residents to move to more suitable accommodation and make best use of stock

- 5.13 Housing services are now delivered seven days a week across the borough through the Library and Resident Services Service Hubs. Each resident approaching housing services is supported with a personal housing plan which sets out an assessment of the resident's current need, next steps for the resident, Royal Borough or other partners, and a written record of any advice and guidance given. The Royal Borough also continues to commission local specialist organisations to provide support services to the housing service. For example, Resilience was commissioned in April 2017 to provide advice, support, treatment and recovery for anyone experiencing alcohol and drug problems in the borough.
- 5.14 Look Ahead Housing Association provides 17 self-contained flats in **Wellesley House**, a supported housing scheme in Windsor. These are available to those people who are homeless and in priority need in the Borough. The accommodation is mainly used for families who have become homeless. The scheme is staffed on a 24 hour basis, and there are a range of support services, including a playgroup, health visitor surgery and parent-craft lessons. All residents are allocated a "key worker" who can assist with any difficulties they may have during their stay.
- 5.15 Look Ahead Housing Association also provides a 25 purpose built block of one bedroomed flats in **Frogmore Court** in Maidenhead which accommodate young people, aged between 16 and 24, who are homeless or threatened with homelessness. The service supports these residents to learn lifestyle skills, such as cooking and financial management, and to secure and maintain education or employment.

- 5.16 A consistent message through ongoing consultation is the need to provide increased support to young people. The Royal Borough will, therefore, produce a new **Young Persons and Housing Protocol**, building on the existing Joint Protocol for working with 16 and 17 year olds, which will support professionals to plan and work together to help support young people into sustainable housing. This new protocol will also be an integral part of the Royal Borough's corporate parenting responsibilities for those young people leaving its care. The Housing Options service and housing associations work closely to enable care leavers to have safe and sustainable accommodation.
- 5.17 The newly refreshed **Homelessness Panel** will provide a common forum for delivering pathway plans for customers. The panel will bring together professionals to work together on outcomes for residents with deliverable actions to be implemented from the meeting.

6 IMPLEMENTATION AND REVIEW

- 6.1 The strategy and delivery plan will be reviewed on an annual basis, both to measure performance against each priority outcome and also to ensure that the actions continue to be the right ones to meet the overall vision. Where identified, new key areas of action to meet strategy objectives will be introduced as part of the review which will also involve partners and key stakeholders.

APPENDIX 1: DELIVERY PLAN

Objective		Key outcomes and actions	Lead	Target date	Resources
1.1	Reduce the numbers of households in temporary accommodation and rough sleeping	Reduce the number of households in temporary accommodation by 50% by April 2019 through the allocations process and private rented sector offer.	Operational Support and Housing Lead	April 2019	Housing Options Team Senior Accommodation Sourcing Officer Housing Enabling Manager Existing capital funding Landlords Citizens Advice Bureau
		Take proactive action to identify those most at risk to prevent them becoming homeless, including exploring the option for court desk attendance in partnership with Slough Borough Council.	Operational Support and Housing Lead	April 2018	
		Develop clear housing pathways to manage access to support services for applicants with multiple needs.	Operational Support and Housing Lead	On-going	
		Review the amount and type of emergency housing provision available and compile a register of resources.	Operational Support and Housing Lead	December 2017	

Objective		Key outcomes and actions	Lead	Target date	Resources
1.1	Reduce the numbers of households in temporary accommodation and rough sleeping	Work proactively with local housing associations and the Citizens Advice Bureau to prevent mortgage repossessions including through the Mortgage Rescue Scheme.	Operational Support and Housing Lead	On-going	Housing Options Team Senior Accommodation Sourcing Officer Housing Enabling Manager Existing capital funding Landlords
		Implement personal housing plans for residents to support households in temporary accommodation to access longer term housing.	Operational Support and Housing Lead	On-going	Citizens Advice Bureau
1.2	Increase the homeless prevention services to meet the requirements in the Homelessness Reduction Act.	Support households retain their current home.	Operational Support and Housing Lead	On-going	Housing Options Team Housing association partners
		Support households find an alternative home, which may be in the private rented sector or a home ownership option.	Operational Support and Housing Lead	On-going	Voluntary sector partners Senior Accommodation Sourcing Officer Housing Enabling Manager
		Support households to access low cost home ownership.	Operational Support and Housing Lead	On-going	Children's Services Existing capital funding
		Enable vulnerable households to secure independence through supported housing pathways.	Operational Support and Housing Lead	On-going	

Objective		Key outcomes and actions	Lead	Target date	Resources
1.3	Produce a new allocations policy by December 2017 to ensure policies support delivery of the objectives in this strategy.	Work with local housing associations to deliver a new allocations policy that meets the housing needs of applicants and promotes effective working with the private sector	Operational Support and Housing Lead	December 2017	Housing Options Team Housing association partners Housing Enabling Manager Existing capital funding
1.4	Use nominations and partnership working to enable social mobility, support residents that need to move to more suitable accommodation and make best use of stock.	Work with local housing associations and the Housing Enabling Manager to identify opportunities for transfers and property conversions to meet changing need.	Operational Support and Housing Lead	On-going	Housing Options Team Housing association partners Housing Enabling Manager Existing capital funding
		Deliver a new Young Persons Protocol in partnership with Children's Services to establish a framework for supporting young people in housing need.	Operational Support and Housing Lead	April 2018	Housing Enabling Manager Housing association partners Children's Services

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