Homelessness Strategy

Contents

Acknowledgements

Appendix: Delivery Plan

Foreword

The housing crisis is particularly acute in London and as an outer London borough Sutton is on the frontline in dealing with the issues this presents.

People are being priced out of central London, and we now see they increasingly cannot afford to rent or buy even in areas like Sutton.

The delivery of affordable housing has fallen way below demand and will take many years to catch up.

As a result Sutton finds itself with increased numbers of people facing homelessness with no affordable options locally. The amount of households placed in temporary accommodation has increased significantly and they are remaining in temporary accommodation for much longer.

As part of our Housing Strategy (ref…) the council is working to increase the amount of affordable homes both in the private sector and with our own stock and this will help meet some of the future demand.

However, with so many households already in crisis the Council must increase its activity to prevent people finding themselves homeless in the first place, and to work closely with partners to provide support and advice so they can maintain their accommodation.

For those currently placed in temporary accommodation the Council has reviewed its approach to seek to help as many households as possible to find permanent homes.

Many of the underlying reasons for people finding themselves facing homelessness are complex, and the support that can be given is constrained by funding pressures. The Council will seek additional funding sources whenever possible to enable it to focus its work to reduce homelessness where it is most needed.

Our aim is to eliminate homelessness, and although achieving that is beyond the powers of this council alone, this strategy sets out how we will play our part in working towards that aim.

Councillor Jayne McCoy
Deputy Leader and Chair of Housing, Economy and Business Committee

1 Introduction

1.1   This document sets out Sutton Council's approach to addressing homelessness in its area. It follows on from and draws on a review of homelessness in the borough, carried out during the autumn of 2019. The review brought together a considerable amount of information on the subject, including trends in statutory homelessness, the use of temporary accommodation, prevention activity, support services and the work ongoing to alleviate rough sleeping. The review document can be found at: https://www.sutton.gov.uk/info/200502/housing_advice_and_options/1418/housing_strategy_and_policy_information

1.2   The Council's plan *Ambitious for Sutton* seeks to promote active citizenship and support people to make informed choices. In the case of homeless and potentially homeless households, through this strategy the Council will help households meet their housing needs by providing high quality housing information and advice services. The plan can be found at: https://www.sutton.gov.uk/info/200564/opportunity_sutton/1784/ambitious_for_sutton

1.3   Our latest housing strategy, in addition to addressing wider issues such as increasing the supply of affordable housing and improving standards, also has the aim of providing housing options advice and tackling homelessness. However, this aim will now be addressed through the delivery of this new homelessness strategy.

1.4   The context within which the Council works is one of very constrained resources, where our overarching aim is both to reduce the negative social, welfare and educational impact of long periods in temporary housing for vulnerable people and families with children and to manage the cost pressures which the Council faces.

Legislative and policy context

1.5   The homelessness review sets out in some detail both the legislative and the policy context surrounding homelessness. In terms of the former, the essential provisions in relation to a local authority's duties and powers are contained in the Housing Act 1996, the Homelessness Act 2002 and, most recently, the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017. More detailed advice is set out in the Homelessness Code of Guidance.

1.6   As the review showed, there is a range of homelessness and related policy issues to be taken into account when formulating strategies, albeit unlike many other areas of public policy there is no national homelessness strategy that local housing authorities are required to work towards or be in conformity with. Given this, the Code of Guidance remains the principal driver.

1.7   The current Homelessness Code of Guidance, published in Feb 2018, clarifies that: "...a homelessness strategy means a strategy for:

  a.   preventing homelessness in the district;

  b.   securing that sufficient accommodation is and will be available for people in the district who are or may become homeless; and,

c. securing the satisfactory provision of support for people in the district who are or may become homeless or who have been homeless and need support to prevent them becoming homeless again."

1.8 The guidance further clarifies the government's expectation that the prevention element of strategies should cover:

- Advice and information provision
- Early identification of at risk households
- Proactive pre-crisis intervention
- Preventing repeat or recurring homelessness
- Partnership arrangements for joint working

1.9 In terms of securing accommodation, the guidance requires that strategies should be based on a review of supply and demand for housing in all its forms, and that proposals should cover:

- Increasing housing supply (across all tenures)
- Accessing the private rented sector
- Access to social housing (including its allocation)
- The need for and use of temporary accommodation
- Supported housing and refuges
- Bringing empty homes into use
- The use of disabled facilities grant

1.10 The guidance acknowledges that for some households homelessness cannot be addressed by simply providing accommodation; they may also require a range of support services to retain their housing and prevent homelessness from reoccurring. In that regard, strategies are expected to cover support for vulnerable single people, rough sleepers, families, victims of domestic violence and households living in temporary accommodation.

1.11 The review also drew out a number of wider factors that influence homelessness, notably mental health, unemployment, relationship breakdown, poverty and welfare benefits. These all need to be taken into account and will form a key part of our strategic thinking.

Strategic approach

1.12 The strategy begins, in chapter 2, with a summary of the key findings of the homelessness review and the views and ideas gathered from the consultation process. The chapter also includes a brief resume of the resources applied and costs associated with homelessness. Drawing from the review, chapter 3 then sets out the Authority's strategic aims and objectives in relation to tackling homelessness in the borough.

1.13 Following the requirements of the Code of Guidance, the next four chapters set out our proposed approach, firstly in terms of the administration of homelessness and policy surrounding main duty decision making. The focus then moves on, in chapters 5, 6

and 7 respectively, to the three key areas of (i) homelessness prevention, (ii) support for homeless households and (iii) provision of accommodation.

1.14 Importantly, the strategy is focussed on what we intend to do differently in future. The huge amount of ongoing day to day activity around preventing, relieving and administering homelessness, and also the work undertaken to tackle rough sleeping is largely captured in the review and therefore not duplicated in this document.

1.15 Chapter 8 briefly describes the arrangements through which delivery of the actions will be monitored and the strategy reviewed over time. The strategy concludes with a delivery plan, which brings together the proposed actions and initiatives from the previous chapters, with resources, lead and supporting organisations identified and timescales set for each, commencing in 2020/21.

2 Homelessness Review Outcomes

2.1 The homelessness review, carried out during the autumn of 2019, gathered a wide range of data and information on all aspects of homelessness. It covered statutory homelessness, prevention and support activity and the accommodating of homeless households. It also looked at the resources that are applied to preventing and administering homelessness and attempted to assess gaps in provision. As by way of context, this chapter provides a brief summary of the review covering: key findings, consultation responses and resources and costs.

Summary of key findings

Homelessness applications and acceptances

2.2 Despite the significant increase in applications in 2018/19, likely to be related to the implementation of the Homelessness Reduction Act, the number of households accepted as homeless only increased slightly over the previous year.

	2014/15	2015/16	2016/17	2017/18	2018/19
Total applications	439	430	447	426	558
Total acceptances	**277**	**309**	**316**	**231**	**243**

Reasons for homelessness

2.3 The table below shows that the three main reasons for homelessness have remained the same over the last five years, with the top three accounting for 90% of all accepted households last year.

Reason for homelessness	2014/15	2015/16	2016/17	2017/18	2018/19
Family / friends no longer willing to accommodate	93	102	91	96	89
Loss of tenancy	85	128	137	73	87
Relationship breakdown	54	49	51	34	43
Other	45	30	37	28	24
All reasons	**277**	**309**	**316**	**231**	**243**

Property size requirements of homeless households

2.4 The following table shows that two bedroom properties consistently account for about 70% of the need amongst homeless households.

Property size required (2017/18 to 2018/19)	No.	Proportion
Bedsit / 1 bed	43	9%
2 bed	331	70%
3 bed	88	19%
4+ beds	12	2%
Total	**474**	**100%**

Use of temporary accommodation

2.5   The table below illustrates the ongoing rise in the number of households in temporary accommodation over the last five years by type of unit. As of 13 January 2020, the total number had increased further to 702.

	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019
B&B (non-self contained)	35	52	77	115	63	58
Self-contained nightly paid	25	45	122	155	198	164
Oakleigh House	0	0	0	35	38	33
Private sector leased	60	45	53	57	86	95
Own stock*	103	137	158	171	183	275
HA stock	2	1	1	1	0	11
Other	0	0	0	0	1	1
Total	**225**	**280**	**411**	**534**	**569**	**637**
Of which out of borough	39	77	182	239	224	186

NB: Figures are as at 31 March

*Includes Andrewes House

Rehousing shortfall

2.6   The following table shows the cumulative impact over the last five years of there being insufficient housing to discharge the main homelessness duty. This is essentially the reason why the numbers in temporary accommodation have increased to the extent that they have over recent years. The subsequent table shows the trend projected forward (based on a simple moving average). It suggests that if current trends continue there could be around 1,200 households in temporary housing in three years' time given that there are now over 700 households living in such accommodation.

	2014/15	2015/16	2016/17	2017/18	2018/19
Households accepted **(A)**	277	309	316	231	243
Rehoused in social housing **(B)**	143	128	156	101	111
Rehoused in the private rented sector **(C)**	46	34	12	21	24
Rehousing shortfall: A - (B+C)	**88**	**147**	**148**	**109**	**108**
Cumulative shortfall	88	235	383	492	600

	2019/20	2020/21	2021/22	2022/23
Households accepted **(A)**	280	276	269	260
Rehoused in social housing **(B)**	128	125	124	118
Rehoused in the private rented sector **(C)**	27	24	22	24
Rehousing shortfall: A - (B+C)	**125**	**127**	**123**	**118**
Cumulative shortfall	125	252	375	493

Summary of consultation responses

2.7   The homelessness review consultation identified a number of issues and gaps in provision in relation to homelessness that need to be addressed. These are set out in chapter 8 of the homelessness review document. The key points of note are:

- the lack of rehousing opportunities to discharge the main homelessness duty resulting in an ongoing increase in the use of temporary accommodation

- the need to better understand the contribution of the voluntary sector in preventing homelessness

- uncertainty around the extent to which preventable homelessness is actually prevented

- the need to ascertain whether additional resources would be effective in preventing more homelessness and, if so, from where they could be found

- a clear need for more floating support and supported housing settings including those that would allow easy access for rough sleepers

- a lack of service provision for certain client groups, notably people with a learning disability and those with mental health issues

- a particular lack of good quality supported housing options for care leavers, especially those who have mental health issues

2.8   A number of other points arose from the Housing, Economy and Business Committee's
       Task and Finish Group discussions; these include:

- that wider factors impacting upon homelessness such as barriers to
  employment also need to be addressed

- the need for more affordable housing generally, including dwellings produced
  through the planning system

- the need to consider alternative and innovative solutions to providing temporary
  accommodation such as through the use of modular construction including
  potentially through the Pan London Accommodation Collaborative Enterprise
  (PLACE) initiative

- the need for more effective working with the community and the voluntary sector

- the potential for reviewing council policy - e.g. in relation to social housing
  tenure

- the skewed geographical distribution of temporary accommodation within the
  borough

Costs and resources

2.9   The review attempted to assess the cost of homelessness to the borough and identify
       the range of resources that are applied to tackling it. These resources are limited and in
       some cases their long-term future is uncertain. Therefore, in managing these, we need
       to target them upon the services and support that will have the most beneficial impact
       on individual households in need, and sometimes consider options which may not be
       as palatable as we would prefer to implement, if the supply of affordable housing and
       revenue resources were greater.

Encompass expenditure and funding

2.10   Statutory housing functions including homelessness and housing advice are carried out
       on the Council's behalf by a separate local authority owned trading company,
       Encompass. This year Encompass's total budgeted spend on homelessness related
       functions amounts to just over £2.5m. This is funded through £1.2m from the Council,
       £1.170m from the government's Flexible Homelessness Support Grant (see below) and
       the remainder from the government's Private Rented Sector (PRS) Access Fund (see
       below).

Government grants

2.11   In terms of government support to local authorities for homelessness and related
       activities, for 2019/20 the Council received the following:

- Flexible Homelessness Support Grant of £1.170m;

- Homelessness Reduction Act new burdens funding of £131k;

- Rough Sleepers Initiative funding of £93,167;

- PRS Access Fund grant amounting to £470k; and

- Discretionary Housing Payment support of £463,784.

Temporary accommodation costs

2.12 A key element of homelessness expenditure for the Council is the cost of providing emergency accommodation in the form of nightly paid bed and breakfast (B&B) and private leased properties. For 2019/20 the annual net cost of the former is estimated at £689,237 and for the latter is £129,963, giving a total estimated net spend of £828,200. B&B costs have reduced significantly compared to the previous year, however, due to the coming on stream of alternative temporary accommodation options with a much lower net cost, notably the acquired council-owned units.

Future resourcing

2.13 From next year, resourcing to deal with homelessness will mainly come from within Encompass's management fee from the Council although the government has announced that a further £1,169,725 will be awarded to Sutton in the form of Flexible Homelessness Support Grant. In addition, £395,725 of new burdens funding in relation to the implementation of the Homelessness Reduction Act and prevention work has been provided from next year. It should be noted that, at present, there is no clarity or certainty about the level of government funding that will be available to local authorities from 2021/22 or indeed whether funding will continue.

3 Strategic Aims and Objectives

3.1 Drawing from the outcome of the review, and taking into account the requirements of the Code of Guidance, the Council's overall strategic aim in relation to tackling homelessness is:

> **To reduce the number of households and individuals finding themselves homeless in the Borough, and for those that do, ensure they receive appropriate help to find permanent, good quality accommodation as quickly as possible.**

3.2 In support of this aim we have identified a number of more specific objectives, these being to:

Preventing homelessness

1. Provide high quality housing advice and information service.

2. Support vulnerable homeless and potentially homeless households, working in partnership with other agencies, to help them maintain their accommodation or find new permanent accommodation.

Help into permanent accommodation

3. Work with private sector landlords to increase the amount of properties available in the borough.

4. Increase the Council's own housing stock.

5. Provide specialist support for people found rough sleeping in the borough, working in partnership with other agencies, helping them to access suitable accommodation and rebuild their lives.

Minimize the use of temporary accommodation

6. Expand the property acquisition programme to reduce temporary placements out of borough and reliance on non-self-contained bed and breakfast accommodation.

3.3 The following chapters, covering homelessness administration, prevention, support and accommodation, describe how through this strategy we will seek to deliver on our aims and objectives.

4 Homelessness Administration

4.1　This chapter is primarily concerned with the processing of homelessness applications and specifically with decision-making around whether or not an applicant household is accepted as being statutorily homeless and thus eligible for either being provided with a social tenancy or otherwise helped to secure appropriate settled accommodation in the private sector.

4.2　In order to be accepted as homeless applicant households need to meet certain criteria, namely they have to be: (i) eligible for assistance, (ii) homeless or threatened with homelessness, (iii) homeless unintentionally, (iv) in priority need, and (v) have a local connection.　However, the process of assessing whether a household should be accepted as homeless is not always straightforward and often a degree of judgement needs to be exercised.

Assessing homelessness applications

4.3　A number of issues in relation to the Council's homelessness assessment role, carried out on its behalf by Encompass, arose in discussions during the review consultation. One question raised was whether unequivocal proof should be required of applicants in order to demonstrate that they are homeless or threatened with homelessness.　The concern was that the Council could in some cases be accepting households who weren't actually homeless or threatened with homelessness and providing assistance or social housing where it wasn't needed.

4.4　On further reflection, and from discussions with Encompass staff, it was felt that although increasing the burden of proof might help to reduce or, more likely, delay the use of emergency accommodation, it could give rise to risks for certain households, in particular vulnerable single people who may ultimately end up sleeping rough.　**Given this, it was decided that the current approach should continue.**

Intentionality

4.5　The criteria used to determine whether an applicant household may have become homeless intentionally has long been the subject of much case law and debate within local housing authorities, particularly when a household has been evicted for rent arrears or anti-social behaviour.　Arguably there have been instances where applicants, who on the face of it through acts of commission or omission have contributed to their homelessness, have nevertheless been deemed unintentionally homeless given that the authority's decision might be overturned if challenged in court.　**The Council will continue to take a realistic and pragmatic approach when determining intentionality, taking into account current legislation and case law.**

Homeless at home policy

4.6　The review clearly showed that after the ending of a tenancy, 'family or friends no longer wishing to accommodate' was the next most common reason for homelessness. In the past, Sutton, like many other councils, has adopted a 'homeless at home' policy. In essence, this is where a household in priority need, commonly a single parent,

approaches the local authority as homeless having been asked to leave the family home. Rather than formally accept them as homeless and placing them in emergency accommodation, through negotiation with the family they are persuaded to remain at home in return for being given high priority on the authority's housing register, ultimately guaranteeing them an offer of social housing.

4.7   This approach, although removing the need to provide accommodation for these households, does have a downside. If the policy were re-adopted, homeless at home households, under the housing allocations policy, would fall into band D on the housing register. To facilitate their being offered social housing, a greater proportion of allocations would need to be made available to band D applicants, which would in practice mean fewer lettings going to actual homeless households who are placed in band B. Consequently, and in the absence of an increase in the overall supply of affordable housing, the waiting time for band B households would increase, with a knock on increase in the time they spend in temporary accommodation.

4.8   A further concern is that such a policy could encourage households, not actually threatened with homelessness, to present as homeless in the knowledge that they will eventually secure social housing rather than have to obtain private rented accommodation. Thus further strain would be put on the already very limited pool of social housing available to discharge the main homelessness duty for households where private rented accommodation might not be a suitable option. **Given these concerns it was decided that the Council should not re-adopt a homeless at home policy.**

Referrals from other agencies

4.9   The review highlighted that the Homelessness Reduction Act duty on other public agencies to refer potentially homeless households to the local housing authority was not widely understood. Accordingly, it is suggested that the duty needs to be better publicised. **This will be picked up by Encompass during 2020/21 through a number of channels with the aim of ensuring that all relevant local agencies sign up to an agreed protocol.**

Other issues

4.10   The review also noted the ongoing disproportionate number of BME households accepted as homeless. It was suggested that this phenomenon should be examined further with a view to seeing if any action might be taken to address the issue. **An action is therefore included in the delivery plan to carry out research, to be led by Encompass**.

4.11   Arising from discussions during the review was the suggestion that the Council could better promote the reporting of street homelessness via its website and the links to other services such as Streetlink. **Again, this will be taken up by Encompass and is included within the strategy's delivery plan.**

4.12   Linked to street homelessness is the worrying increase in modern slavery and associated street begging. **The Council, working through Encompass and with the police and other key agencies,will seek to and address this at the local level.**

5 Homelessness Prevention

5.1 As the review demonstrated, through Encompass and working alongside a range of other agencies both voluntary and statutory, the Council undertakes an enormous amount of homelessness prevention work locally. Nevertheless the review sought to ascertain what more might be done within existing resources and whether further resources, if they could be made available, would be cost effective.

Housing advice

5.2 In terms of housing and homelessness advice, one suggestion was whether the Council could make more use of advice 'apps'. **It was also agreed that, subject to resources, a homelessness 'one-stop shop' with its own dedicated web site should be set up in order to provide a more coordinated approach to prevention and promote inter-agency working and cooperation.**

5.3 It was suggested that training could be offered to other front line public workers to help them signpost homeless and potentially homeless households to advice / support services. **This training could either be done through the establishment of a new homelessness forum or via existing fora, and this is included as an action to be pursued during 2020/21.**

Prevention services and the role of the voluntary sector

5.4 A further question that arose out of the review was the extent of the Council's understanding and knowledge of the work of the voluntary sector and the community at large in helping to prevent homelessness. Related to this was the fundamental question of how much more homelessness could be prevented, and whether deploying additional resources would be cost effective in achieving this. **It is suggested that one way to try and ascertain a clearer picture would be to undertake some form of casework analysis.**

5.5 A particular concern raised during the review was in relation to unemployed lone female parents who become homeless and whether more help could be offered to assist them into (or back into) employment. Some lone parents may of course prefer to devote their time to raising their children during their early years, but for others gaining employment while securing appropriate child care would be their preference. **The Council intends to investigate how homelessness could be better prevented and ways for helping those who want to work to get into employment.**

5.6 Given the significant proportion of homelessness resulting from relationship breakdown there is clearly potential scope for doing more to prevent homelessness by tackling this particular cause. **One area that will be looked at is the housing management policy and the associated procedures adopted by the Council and other social landlords in the case of relationship breakdown. It was proposed that more should also be done to provide support in terms of relationship counselling and family mediation.**

6 Support for Homeless Households

6.1 Alongside prevention activity, and sometimes linked to it, there are a number of support services available to homeless and potentially homeless households in the borough. Nevertheless the review highlighted a number of possible gaps in provision and suggested an overall lack of strategic coordination.

6.2 Again as with prevention work, there is clearly a need to better understand and coordinate the work of the voluntary sector and faith groups in supporting homeless households. A particular suggestion was to **explore what support the Sutton Refugee and Migrant Network does or could provide and establish a closer working relationship.** It was also felt that **the housing and support needs of specific groups such as people with a mental health issue and those with a learning difficulty needed to be clarified and quantified.**

6.3 There were concerns expressed during the review that floating support provision needed to be increased, including for households in B&B and temporary accommodation who could also benefit from improved information about health services. More generally, it was suggested that **homelessness support should be linked into education, training, employment services to enhance the independence of homeless people.**

6.4 In terms of support provision generally, it was argued that the screening undertaken before referrals to supported housing are made needs to be improved. Better advice on support pathways would also be of benefit as would improved outreach work in hospitals.

6.5 Regarding support for rough sleepers, it was suggested that **funding for street homelessness outreach services should be increased in order to allow them to operate 7 days per week.** Over the longer term, enhanced outreach services supplied by SPEAR or other providers, may be able to help the 'hidden homeless'. It was also felt that Encompass could work more closely and in collaboration with Sutton Nightwatch to improve services to rough sleepers.

6.6 For young people, it has been suggested that the Council could re-run the Sutton Time Out Project (STOP) project for vulnerable homeless 16/17 year olds subject to identifying suitable premises and a clear business case. The original scheme run a few years ago was brought to an end due to a lack of referrals resulting in it becoming financially unviable. **However, circumstances have changed and may merit a review of supported housing for young homeless people.**

7 Accommodating Homeless Households

7.1 The review showed that if current trends were to continue the numbers of households living in temporary accommodation, having increased from 280 to around 700 over the last five years, could reach 1,200 in the next three years. This is fundamentally because of the lack of rehousing opportunities for the Council to discharge its main homelessness duty. There are, however, a number of other options for discharging the main duty which could be considered and these are discussed below. The chapter goes on to look at issues with the housing allocations policy and the provision of supported accommodation.

Options for main duty discharge

Discharging out of borough

7.2 Currently only households in temporary accommodation are placed out of borough; the main duty is only discharged either via the offer of a social let or through securing a within-borough private let. In some cases exceptions to this policy are made, but only with the consent of the household. Following consideration **the Council has opted to maintain this policy and not require homeless households to move out of the borough on a permanent basis against their wishes even though this may mean they remain in temporary accommodation longer than they otherwise might. The Council will, however, continue to encourage out of borough discharge on a voluntary basis in appropriate cases and where such a move would be considered reasonable.**

Converting temporary council stock lettings to permanent

7.3 There are currently a significant number of homeless households occupying a council dwelling as temporary accommodation. Of these, around 50 have been placed in accommodation which is of a 'correct size'. It would be possible to discharge the main duty by giving these households a 'permanent' tenancy of their temporary home. However, this would not be possible in the case of the ex-Right to Buy units that have recently been bought back by the Council due to their needing to be let at higher than social rents to make them financially viable.

7.4 Adopting such a policy would have the immediate benefit of reducing temporary accommodation numbers, albeit it would commensurately reduce the numbers of council units available for future temporary accommodation usage. **However, on balance such an approach is considered to be beneficial and will be pursued going forward.**

7.5 The Council could go one step further and **offer permanent tenancies of council-owned temporary accommodation to occupying households who are bedroom deficient.** There are over 100 such households living in non-acquired properties who are deficient by one bedroom. For example, a lone parent with one child will often be placed temporarily in a one bedroom property although s/he would be entitled to a two bedroom permanent home under the allocations policy. Given that households in this instance would be entitled to a larger permanent home, discharge of the main duty could only be on a voluntary basis. Were the household to accept a

permanent tenancy they would immediately be entitled to apply for a transfer to larger accommodation.

Extending the property acquisition programme

7.6   Fundamentally, in order to address the ongoing increase in temporary accommodation solutions need to be found that increase housing supply. The programme of buying back ex-council stock has been successful in returning over 100 properties to the social sector to date, but the opportunity for further ex-council acquisitions is gradually reducing. There is, however, the possibility of acquiring properties from elsewhere, including from other social landlords and from the private market.

7.7   **Accordingly the Council is exploring the possibility of running a new acquisition programme, where properties would be held outside of the Housing Revenue Account within one of the Council's existing arms-length vehicles such as Sutton Housing Partnership or Encompass.** The acquired units could either be temporary accommodation or used to discharge the main homelessness duty, but they would be let on assured shorthold tenancies.

Making better use of the private rented sector

7.8   **Through Encompass the Council will seek to increase main duty discharges into private lettings within the borough, where necessary by guaranteeing rents for at least a six month period.** It will also review the amounts offered under its rent deposit / guarantee scheme and may also offer insurance against rent arrears. **Subject to landlord agreement, the Council will also seek to convert private sector leased units at the end of the term to direct lets thereby enabling discharge of the main duty to the occupying household.**

7.9   Encompass recently developed an online landlord-tenant matching scheme - *renttll* - to help households access and maintain private lets. It was suggested during the review that **the Council should establish a local landlord accreditation scheme to identify and disseminate information on rogue landlords. This will be examined further next year.**

Maximising social sector resources

7.10   **In order to increase its nominations to housing association lettings the Council, again through Encompass, will explore the idea of 'incentivisation'.** One idea, for example, might be to offer to fund void works from its Flexible Homelessness Support Grant, if resources permit.

Housing allocations policy

7.11   Currently a high proportion of two bedroomed social lettings that become available are directed towards homeless households; significant numbers of both one and three bedroomed homes are also allocated to the homeless. Numbers could be increased further but this will have an impact on other priority or 'reasonable preference' groups on the housing register such as households who are occupying properties with insanitary conditions. **Nevertheless the proportion of lettings that go to homeless households will be continually kept under review as part of the annual lettings plan process.**

7.12 The shortage of social housing also prompted during the review the question of whether council tenancies should continue to be granted on a 'home for life' basis. The use of fixed term (or flexible) tenancies to make most efficient use of social housing resources was last considered when the allocations policy and tenancy strategy were reviewed back in 2011/12. Although rejected at the time, this could be reconsidered as one way of helping to alleviate the homelessness situation, albeit the benefits would only be realised over the longer term. **For the time being, however, the Council will maintain its policy of granting 'tenancies for life' whilst providing incentives to voluntary downsizing.**

Supported accommodation

7.13 In addition to the need for more accommodation for the homeless generally, **the Council will consider setting up an affordable group living / shared accommodation scheme for homeless single people**. **It also proposes to investigate the benefits of setting up a supported lodging scheme for young people and possibly a 'crash pad' scheme for vulnerable young people with 24 hr support.** Mention has already been made of perhaps running another STOP project for homeless 16/17 year olds, if suitable premises can be identified.

7.14 The homelessness review highlighted a specific need to provide more suitable accommodation for care leavers, including those with multiple needs, along with move on options from temporary settings. A further suggestion was to perhaps introduce a Housing First model for care leavers. **Going forward this will be considered by the Council.**

7.15 The review also revealed a need to better quantify the need for and provide more supported housing for certain other groups - for example, rough sleepers and those with a dual diagnosis. **This work will be taken forward during 2020/21 including investigating the scope for direct delivery of supported housing, working with other council services.**

7.16 To address issues faced by children living in temporary accommodation, which can sometimes be for a number of years, Public Health are leading on a project to enable a variety of support to be provided to families. This will focus on improving children's health and education and generally enhance their life chances. **Encompass, the health service, and the Council's children, schools and welfare services will all be supporting a programme of initiatives during 2020/21**.

8 Monitoring and Review

8.1   Given its significance to society and the wide range of agencies involved in tackling homelessness and rough sleeping, it is proposed that the Council sets up a steering group to oversee the delivery of the strategy. **A further suggestion made during the review was to re-establish a borough-wide homelessness forum to share ideas, issues of concern and good practice, and to generally foster partnership working.**

8.2   Through the Council's governance arrangements for overseeing the performance of Encompass, monitoring of the actions within the delivery plan will be undertaken on a regular basis. Outcomes will also be reported periodically to Council members, including through reports to the Housing, Economy and Business Committee at appropriate intervals.

8.3   Although no specific timescale for the strategy has been set, there will be a need to review it over time. It is intended that the document be refreshed at the appropriate juncture depending upon prevailing circumstances.

Acknowledgements

The Council would like to thank all who have participated in and contributed to its review of homelessness and the production of this homelessness strategy. Many individuals and organisations have played their part, but particular thanks go to Encompass, to a number of other services within the Council, notably Adult Social Care, Public Health and Sutton Housing Partnership as well as the members of the Homelessness Strategy Task and Finish Group. The Council is also particularly grateful for the work and input from Community Action Sutton and the local voluntary sector as well as other statutory agencies, housing providers and its various commissioned services who provide homelessness related support services.