

Homelessness Strategy Update

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Foreword

A key priority for the Council, as set out in its corporate plan, is to “work with partners to support people who are homeless or at risk of becoming homeless, intervening early before issues escalate”. Through its homelessness strategy, the Council will seek to help households meet their housing needs by providing high quality housing information and advice services, along with temporary accommodation in accordance with its statutory obligations.

The many years of Central Government underfunding of social and affordable housing has led to a depletion in availability of stock in the sector. In addition to this, the current cost of living crisis is having a major impact on homelessness, with the total number of households in temporary accommodation in England exceeding 100,000 for the first time in 20 years, and Sutton experiencing significant accommodation supply pressures locally. We accepted 252 households as homeless in 2022/23 and now have well over 900 homeless households living in temporary accommodation. As Central Government's continued reliance on the private rental sector to provide housing to local authorities remains unabated, inflationary pressures, interest rate increases and private landlord price rises, are hitting already strained Council budgets.

With London experiencing the bulk of the homelessness pressure, no borough in the capital, or indeed elsewhere in the country, can hope to eliminate homelessness in the foreseeable future, as the macro-economic and social factors determining homelessness are not within the control of councils. Without a coherent national strategy to bring forward and retain housing at social rent values, Londoners will continue to be priced out of their home towns, with the burden for temporary accommodation costs being passed on to local authorities and therefore local taxpayers.

Within Sutton's homelessness strategy are a number of proposals and ideas that taken together may at least help to mitigate the impact of homelessness in the borough and minimise the cost to the public purse. Many of these initiatives will need detailed consideration in the face of these national challenges. Therefore, the Council will be working with its homelessness service provider, Encompass over the coming months to carry out this work and take the proposals forward in the best interests of Sutton residents.

Cllr David Bartolucci

Chair, Housing Economy and Business Committee

1 Introduction

- 1.1 This document sets out Sutton Council’s approach to addressing homelessness in its area. It updates the previous homelessness strategy, published in 2020, taking into account the impact of the pandemic, the cost of living crisis and other factors that have had a bearing on homelessness over the last three years.
- 1.2 The updated strategy draws on a refreshed review of homelessness in the borough, carried out during the spring of 2023. This latest review updated a considerable amount of pre-pandemic 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 [here](#).
- 1.3 The Council’s corporate plan *Ambitious for Sutton* includes six priorities, one of which is *Quality and affordable housing*. To support this the Council has the stated ambition to: “Work with partners to support people who are homeless or at risk of becoming homeless, intervening early before issues escalate”. Through its homelessness strategy the Council will help households meet their housing needs by providing high quality information and advice services. The corporate plan can be found [here](#).
- 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 that it 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 housing 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 shows, 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 policy driver.
- 1.7 The current Homelessness Code of Guidance, first published in Feb 2018 (and regularly updated online, most recently in January 2023), 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 including 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 families, vulnerable single people, rough sleepers, 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 recent homelessness review. The chapter also includes a brief resume of the resources applied and costs associated with homelessness. 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.

2 Homelessness Review Key Outcomes

- 2.1 The latest homelessness review, carried out during the spring of 2023, provided a wide range of up to date 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's key findings along with updated information on costs and resources.

Summary of key findings

Homelessness applications and acceptances

- 2.2 The number of homelessness applications dropped markedly during the pandemic years (2020/21 and 2021/22). However, they then increased considerably in 2022/23. The same trend was seen in relation to acceptances, which increased by almost 30% in 2022/23 compared to the previous year. At the same time, the proportion of applications that were accepted rose from 44% in 2018/19 to 56% in 2022/23.

	2018/19	2019/20	2020/21	2021/22	2022/23
Total applications	558	401	264	273	447
Total acceptances	243	275	201	196	252

Reasons for homelessness

- 2.3 The table below shows that the main reasons for homelessness have remained the same over the last five years, with the top three accounting for almost 90% of all accepted households last year. The much lower numbers of households becoming homeless as a result of loss of tenancy in 2020/21 and 2021/22 are also likely to be related to the pandemic.

Reason for homelessness	2018/19	2019/20	2020/21	2021/22	2022/23
Family / friends no longer willing to accommodate	89	105	102	67	79
Loss of tenancy	87	100	29	50	81
Relationship breakdown	43	38	51	54	66
Harassment	0	9	7	7	6
Mortgage arrears	0	1	0	1	0
Left institution / care	3	5	5	0	3
Other	21	17	7	17	17
All reasons	243	275	201	196	252

Property size requirements of homeless households

2.4 The following table shows, firstly, that by far the greatest need amongst accepted homeless households is for one and two bedroom homes. The demand for three bedroom accommodation seems to have reduced since 2018/19, albeit increasing again in 2020/21 and 2021/22.

Property size required	2018/19	2019/20	2020/21	2021/22	2022/23
Bedsit / 1 bedroom	22	64	50	62	63
2 bedroom	170	184	144	117	168
3 bedroom	45	25	7	13	20
4+ bedroom	6	2	0	4	1
Total	243	275	201	196	252

Use of temporary accommodation

2.5 The table below illustrates the ongoing rise in the number of households in temporary accommodation (at financial year end) over the last five years by type of unit. Although 454 homes is the highest number of council-owned stock ever used as temporary accommodation, it falls short in meeting the demand for placements. The increase in these numbers has been directly attributed to the injection of over 200 ex-council homes acquired for use as temporary accommodation since 2017. As the table also shows, there is a high reliance on nightly paid accommodation (NPA) to meet demand with a significant number of these units located out of the borough.

Accommodation type	2018/19	2019/20	2020/21	2021/22	2022/23
Council owned/SHP managed	250	304	368	431	454
NPA - self-contained	154	128	133	130	216
PSL	92	107	121	111	101
NPA - shared	60	90	134	117	95
Andrewes House	23	22	23	21	23
Oakleigh House	33	33	37	33	38
Transform	9	9	6	9	9
Other	3	6	6	6	4
Total	624	699	828	858	940
Of which out of borough	111	87	127	100	165

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. As can be seen, since 2018/19 the shortfall has risen from 130 to 525 units. This is essentially the reason

why the numbers in temporary accommodation have increased to the extent that they have over recent years.

	2018/19	2019/20	2020/21	2021/22	2022/23
Nos. households accepted (A)	243	275	201	196	252
Re-housed in social housing (B)	113	175	100	102	144
Re-housed in the private sector (C)	0	0	0	1	7
Rehousing shortfall: A - (B+C)	130	100	101	93	101
Cumulative shortfall	130	230	331	424	525

- 2.7 The following table takes into account trends in the numbers of lettings becoming available and homeless households allocated social housing, as well as those that secure a private let. It then extrapolates the rehousing shortfall, annually and cumulatively, over this and the next three years resulting in a further shortfall of 500 units over the period. When this figure is added to the number of households currently in temporary accommodation (940) it suggests that there could be well over 1,400 households living in temporary accommodation by 2026/27.

	2023/24	2024/25	2025/26	2026/27
Nos. households accepted (A)	238	243	248	254
Nos. re-housed in social housing (B)	86	122	121	120
Re-housed in the private sector (C)	6	8	9	11
Rehousing shortfall: A - (B+C)	146	113	118	123
Cumulative shortfall	146	259	377	500

Costs and resources

- 2.8 The review attempted to reassess 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.

Encompass expenditure and funding

- 2.9 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. Encompass's expenditure and income over the last three years is summarised in the table below.

	2020/21 outturn (£)	2021/22 outturn (£)	2022/23 budget (£)
Expenditure			
Advice, Assessment and Information; Property Management and Temporary Accommodation	3,783,113	3,858,776	3,935,951
Resources			
Contract sum (from the Council)	2,582,886	2,247,326	2,068,738
Homelessness Prevention Grant	1,200,227	1,524,000	1,630,313
Rough Sleepers Initiative (RSI)	0	0	100,000
Ukraine Resettlement Grant	0	0	68,000
Accommodation for Ex-Offenders Grant	0	87,450	68,900
Totals	3,783,113	3,858,776	3,935,951

2.10 This year (2023/24) Encompass's total budgeted spend on homelessness related functions amounts to just over £2.5m. This is funded through £1.2m from the Council contract sum, £1.176m from the Government's Homelessness Prevention Grant (see below) and the remainder from the Domestic Abuse Uplift.

2.11 In terms of government support to the Authority for homelessness and related activities, for 2023/24 the Council anticipates receiving the following:

- Homelessness Prevention Grant - £1,756,536
- Rough Sleepers Initiative funding - £314,100
- Domestic Abuse Act new burdens funding - £73,480
- Ex offenders accommodation funding - £210,264
- Discretionary Housing Payment support - £346,556

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. The following table summarises the net cost per annum over the last three years.

	2020/21 (£)	2021/22 (£)	2022/23 (£)
Nightly paid accommodation	1,304,124	775,855	1,317,450
Private leased units	173,876	98,629	250,766
Total	1,478,000	874,484	1,568,216

The cost of renting privately

2.13 The table below shows the costs, at March 2023, of renting privately in the borough and the extent of the shortfall in terms of the degree to which rents are now outstripping the Local Housing Allowance rates.

Property Size	Median Market Rents (£)	Local Housing Allowance (rounded) (£)	Monthly Shortfall (rounded) (£)	Annual shortfall (rounded) (£)
1 Bedroom with shared facilities	800	449	351	4,215
1 bedroom - Self-contained	1,300	873	427	5,129
2 Bedrooms - Self-contained	1,625	1,097	528	6,336
3 Bedrooms - Self contained	2,100	1,371	729	8,745
4 bedrooms - self-contained	2,500	1,730	770	9,237

3 Strategic Aims and Objectives

- 3.1 Drawing from the outcome of the recent review, and taking into account relevant legislation and the updated Code of Guidance, the Council's overall strategic aim in relation to tackling homelessness remains:

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:

Prevention of homelessness

1. Provide high quality housing advice and information services.
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.

Helping homeless households access permanent accommodation

3. Work with private sector landlords to increase the amount of properties available to homeless households.
4. Increase the Council's own housing stock.
5. Maximise the allocation of permanent social lettings to homeless households.

Minimise 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.

Tackle rough sleeping

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

- 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 2019 review consultation. One question raised was whether unequivocal proof should be required of applicants in order to demonstrate that they are indeed 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 subsequent 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. **However, Encompass will, during 2023/24, discuss the burden of proof issue with our sub-regional borough counterparts to see if a change in approach might be appropriate.**

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.
- 4.6 Through Encompass, 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

- 4.7 The review clearly showed that along with the ending of a tenancy, ‘family or friends no longer wishing to accommodate’ was the 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 accepting 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 a degree of priority on the authority’s housing register, ultimately guaranteeing them an offer of social housing.
- 4.8 This approach, although removing the need to provide temporary accommodation for these households, does have some disadvantages. Under the housing allocations policy homeless at home households 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 resulting in the waiting time for Band B households increasing.
- 4.9 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 having to obtain private rented accommodation. However, given the scale of the problem in accessing affordable temporary accommodation it is felt that reintroducing the policy may have an overall benefit. **Accordingly, Encompass will carry out further work to assess the case for reintroducing a homeless at home option to applicants, on a case by case basis.**

Referrals from other agencies

- 4.10 The 2019 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. **In view of this, it is suggested that the duty should be further publicised. This will be taken forward by Encompass during 2023/24 using relevant communication channels.**

Other issues

- 4.11 The recent review confirmed the continuing disproportionate number of BAME households accepted as homeless. **This trend will be examined further by Encompass during 2023/24, with a view to seeing if any action might be taken to address the issue.**
- 4.12 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 forward by Encompass and included as part of its website refresh and wider delivery plan activities.**

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 It was suggested that training could be offered to other front line public sector workers to help them signpost homeless and potentially homeless households to advice / support services. **This training, which could either be done through online workshops or via existing fora, will be pursued by Encompass during 2023/24.**

Prevention activity

- 5.4 A further question that arose out of the review was whether it might be cost effective to increase resources deployed on prevention work. In other works whether the cost of, say, additional staffing might be more than offset by savings in temporary accommodation etc. **The issue needs further examination and so Encompass will carry out a business case analysis during 2023/24.**
- 5.5 A particular concern raised during the previous 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.
- 5.6 With regard to support into employment, an initiative is already underway with Jobcentre Plus to secure funding to provide for a support worker to help those individuals in temporary accommodation seeking employment opportunities.
- 5.7 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 by the Council is the housing management policy and the associated procedures adopted by other social landlords in the case of relationship breakdown.**

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 2019 review had 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 from the 2019 review was to explore what support the Sutton Refugee and Migrant Network 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 considered.
- 6.3 There were concerns expressed during the previous 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 and employment services to enhance the independence of homeless people. **The identified gaps in provision in relation to homelessness support will be explored further jointly by Encompass and the Council over the coming year.**
- 6.4 Regarding support for rough sleepers, over the longer term, enhanced outreach services supplied by SPEAR or other providers, may be able to help the 'hidden homeless'.

7 Accommodating Homeless Households

- 7.1 The latest homelessness review showed that if current trends were to continue the numbers of households living in temporary accommodation, having increased from 624 to 940 (50%) over the last five years, could exceed 1,400 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 emergency and 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 within borough either via the offer of a social let or through securing a local private let. In some cases exceptions to this policy are made, but only with the consent of the household. **However, in light of the latest outcomes, and the fact that most other London boroughs are now discharging the main duty out of borough, Encompass will carry out further work on the terms on which a policy of discharging the main homelessness duty out of borough can be introduced**

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, nearly 100 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, in the case of the ex-Right to Buy units that have recently been bought back by the Council (see below), which are let at LHA rents to make them financially viable, this option may not be possible for all households, particularly for those affected by the benefit cap. Nevertheless, Encompass will continue to pursue discharge within the existing dwelling on a case by case basis.

Use of property acquisitions

- 7.4 The programme of buying back ex-council stock to provide a better temporary accommodation solution has been successful in returning over 200 properties to the social sector since 2017. However, the opportunity for further ex-council buybacks has effectively been blocked due to a change in government policy precluding the application of RTB receipts to acquisitions that are used as temporary accommodation. As a consequence it has been decided to end the programme and transfer the portfolio to the Council's housing development company, Sutton Living Ltd (SLL) and discharge the main homelessness duty to the current occupants. SLL will, however, continue to seek to acquire properties from within the private sector, which can increase the stock of housing available to the homeless.

Making better use of the private rented sector

- 7.5 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. **Encompass will also review the amounts offered to tenants under its rent**

deposit / guarantee scheme and may also offer private landlords insurance against rent arrears.

- 7.6 Subject to landlord agreement, Encompass will continue 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.
- 7.7 Encompass has developed an online landlord-tenant matching scheme - *renttll* - to help households access and maintain private lets. The uptake is steady, and the site provides another option for those seeking stable accommodation.
- 7.8 It has become clear that in terms of attracting private landlords to let to the homeless, neighbouring boroughs are offering much higher 'golden handshake' payments (often up to £6,000). **In light of this, and with a view to remaining competitive in the market, during 2023/24 Encompass will undertake a financial assessment of the impact of increasing the amounts offered by Sutton.**

Housing allocations policy

Proportion of social lets allocated to the homeless

- 7.9 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.

Tacking under-occupation in the council stock

- 7.10 Like many housing authorities, Sutton Council has been operating an under-occupation policy for many years under which social housing tenants living in the borough are offered cash incentives to downsize. This can free up valuable family sized units that may be offered to homeless households. **To see if the policy could be more effective, Encompass will review the incentives offered to ascertain whether a greater number of larger homes could be made available for a relatively small cost.**

Securing emergency accommodation

- 7.11 An increasing issue recently has been the problems faced by Encompass in securing a guaranteed supply emergency (B&B hotel) accommodation in sufficient numbers and at reasonable prices. This has been exacerbated by other boroughs in the area block booking hotels for periods. **While block booking has a financial downside insofar as the authority can be liable for costs when units remain empty, Encompass will now consider block booking in circumstances where, on balance, it may be financially and operationally effective to do so.**

Supported accommodation

- 7.12 The 2019 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. Since then the Council has recommissioned its

supported accommodation offer for care leavers and a small group of homeless young people with Depaul and Barnardos, and is about to launch a dynamic purchasing scheme for semi-independent accommodation options for care leavers. We also have the floating support offer using council properties in the borough - primarily for unaccompanied asylum seeking young people. Additional properties are being added to this portfolio to further increase capacity in 2023/24. However, there remain barriers that prevent successful move on to independence for this cohort that will be reviewed.

- 7.13 The homelessness 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. The ambition still exists to undertake direct delivery of supported housing, working with other council services, and further work is required to identify the scale and scope of this option.
- 7.14 As the current commissioned housing support service for homeless vulnerable adults is in the last year of contract, a review of this service is currently taking place with a view to redesigning the service model.
- 7.15 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 2023/24.

8 Monitoring and Review

- 8.1 Given its significance to society and the wide range of agencies involved in tackling homelessness and rough sleeping, the Council will maintain close oversight in the delivery of the actions set within the strategy. Through the Council's governance arrangements for overseeing the performance of Encompass, monitoring of the actions within the delivery plan will be undertaken and reported through normal business linked to relevant committees and management teams.
- 8.2 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.

Delivery Plan

Ref.	Action	Lead organisation	Timescale
1	Discuss the burden of proof issue with Sutton's sub-regional borough counterparts to see if a change in approach might be appropriate.	Encompass	2023/24
2	Carry out further work to assess the case for reintroducing a homeless at home option to applicants, on a case by case basis.	Encompass	2023/24
3	Further publicise the referral duty.	Encompass	2023/24
4	Examine further the disproportionate number of BAME households accepted as homeless, with a view to seeing if any action might be taken to address the issue.	Encompass	2023/24
5	Better promote the reporting of street homelessness via the Council's website and the links to other services such as Streetlink.	Encompass	Ongoing
6	Offer training to other front line public sector workers to help them signpost homeless and potentially homeless households to advice / support services.	Encompass	2023/24
7	Examine whether it might be cost effective to increase resources deployed on prevention work.	Encompass	2023/24
8	Review the Council's housing management policy and the associated procedures adopted by other social landlords in the case of relationship breakdown.	The Council	2023/24
9	Further explore the identified gaps in provision in relation to homelessness support over the coming year.	Encompass and the Council	2023/24
10	Carry out further work on the terms on which a policy of discharging the main homelessness duty out of borough can be introduced.	Encompass	2023/24
11	Review the amounts offered to tenants under the rent deposit / guarantee scheme and offer private landlords insurance against rent arrears.	Encompass	2023/24
12	Undertake a financial assessment of the impact of increasing the 'golden handshake' amounts offered to private landlords.	Encompass	2023/24
13	Review the incentives offered to under occupying social tenants to ascertain whether a greater number of larger homes could be made available for a relatively small cost.	Encompass	2023/24
14	Consider block booking B&B hotels in circumstances where, on balance, it may be financially and operationally effective to do so.	Encompass	Ongoing