

Reading Borough Council's Homelessness Strategy

2016 - 2021

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Foreword
By Councillor Richard Davies,
Lead Member for Housing

Welcome to Reading's Homelessness Strategy 2016-2021, in which we set out the Council's priorities to prevent homelessness and also stress the importance of working in partnership to address the wide range of issues that can be linked to homelessness.

Reading Borough Council has demonstrated a strong commitment to tackle and prevent homelessness and has invested significantly in services to protect our most vulnerable residents and narrow the gaps in Reading.

Since the publication of Reading's previous Homelessness Strategy we've made substantial progress in a number of key prevention activities, however in the last few years we have had seen an unprecedented increase in demand on our homelessness services. The competitive housing market - combined with external economic pressures such as the reduced funding environment and significant changes to the way that benefits are paid - has meant that some households have been unable to access or sustain suitable accommodation.

The approach detailed in this strategy involves a commitment to early intervention and homelessness prevention. I will continue to have regular contact with officers and cover the importance of activities to prevent homelessness and the detail of the local response.

Councillor Richard Davies
Lead Member for Housing



Reading Context

Reading Borough Council is a unitary authority in the heart of the Thames Valley, 41 miles west of London. With a compact geographical boundary, Reading borough is densely populated, covering 40 square kilometres and with a population of approximately 155,000 people from nearly 63,000 households¹. The urban area centred on Reading extends beyond the borough boundaries into West Berkshire and Wokingham and has a total population of more than a quarter of a million people.

With a strong and buoyant economy, Reading has been in a comparatively robust position to cope with the recent economic downturn. In 2014 the Reading and Bracknell area was ranked top in the *Good Growth for Cities* index for the second year running, based on indicators considered key to economic success and wellbeing (including employment, health, income and skills)². In its report *Cities Outlook 2015*, Centre for Cities ranked the Greater Reading area as number one in the UK for the economic contribution per worker and third for the number of businesses per capita³.

Reading's appeal both to employers and employees is one reason that the local housing market is in high demand across all tenures, with house prices amongst the highest outside of London. Figure 1 shows the rise in average house prices since the publication of Reading's previous Homelessness Strategy.

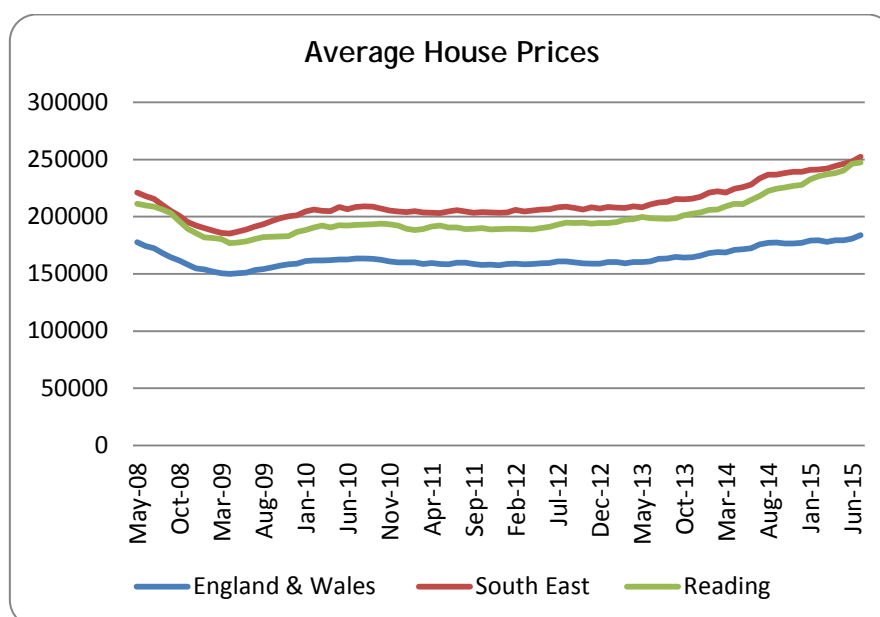


Figure 1 Average house prices in Reading compared to the whole of England and Wales and the South East May 2008 - July 2015⁴

¹ Census (2011)

² *Good Growth for Cities* (2014) PwC/Demos

³ *City Monitor Data* (2015) Centre for Cities

⁴ Land Registry House Price Index



In 2014 the Government announced that Crossrail will be extended to Reading and it has been predicted that this will further impact housing demand and costs. The Crossrail Property Impact Study 2012 predicted that property prices will rise 2% and rental prices will rise 1% in the first stage of the scheme (2012-2017) as a result of the west section of the line being developed, increasing from 2018 onwards to 3.5% for property prices and 2% for rental prices.

Tenure type in Reading

The 2011 census found that home ownership is the most common tenure type in Reading with over half of households owning their home, followed by privately renting (26%) and then social housing tenants (16%) - see Figure 2. The Private Sector Housing Stock Condition Survey 2013 indicated that 28.5% of dwellings in Reading were in the Private Rented Sector (PRS), compared to an average of 21.4% nationally (2011/12).

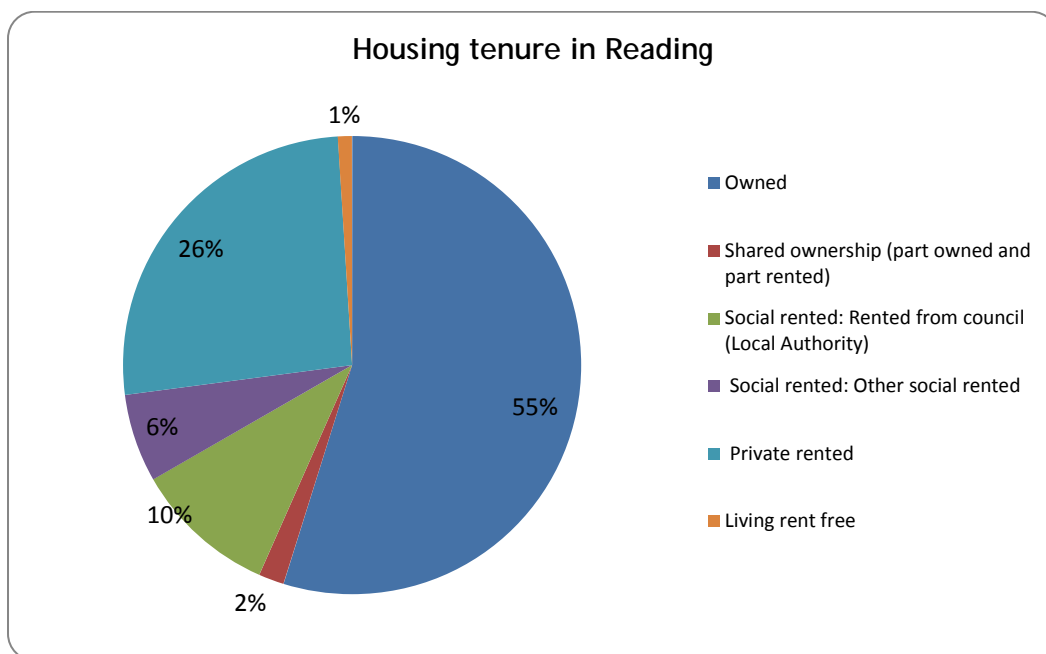


Figure 2 Breakdown of tenure type of Reading residents (2011 census)

Similarly to home ownership, the cost of privately renting in Reading has also increased. Demand for private rented accommodation locally is fuelled not only by the buoyant economy but also fewer households buying property, the student and young professional markets and households moving out of London to seek more affordable accommodation - all competing with those on a lower income.

This has had a particular impact upon residents on a low income who need to claim Local Housing Allowance (LHA) to contribute to their rent. In April 2011 the Government changed the way that LHA is calculated so that it is based on the 30th percentile (meaning that only 3 in ten properties would be affordable to anyone claiming LHA) and has been reassessed annually based on the previous year's market rents. Figure 3 demonstrates the rising cost of rent for a two bedroom property compared with the eligible rate of LHA, showing an increasing gap between the two. The LHA rate for a 2 bed property as of April 2015 is £816.10 a

month which, at the time of writing, compares to an average market rent for a two bedroom property in Reading⁵ of £1,096 per calendar month⁶. In July 2015 it was announced as part of the Emergency Budget the Local Housing Allowance will be frozen for 4 years. Therefore the 2 bed LHA rate will stay at £816.10 until 2019, regardless of any changes to average market rents.

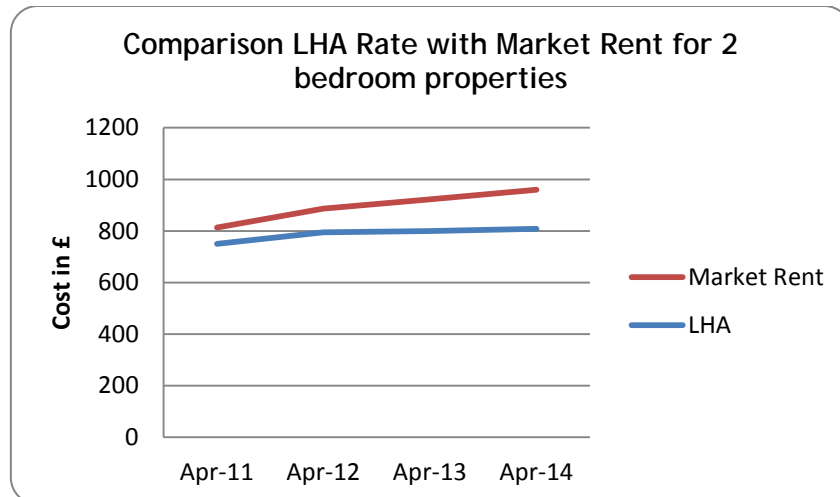


Figure 3 Average market rate for a 2 bedroom property compared to the eligible amount of Local Housing Allowance as of April of the referenced year

Partly because of the comparatively high cost of renting or buying a house in Reading, many people register to bid for social housing with the Council's Choice Based Lettings scheme, known as 'Homechoice at Reading'. There are currently on average 107 new applications to Homechoice at Reading made every month and in June 2015 there were 10,364 households registered - compared with a total number of approximately 11,700 units of social housing in the borough.

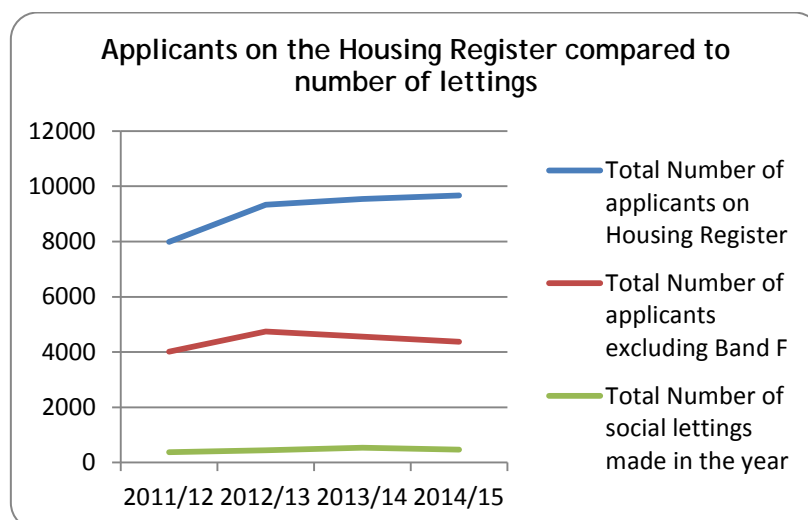


Figure 4 Number of applicants on the Council's Housing Register, number excluding those in Band F and number of social lettings made that year

⁵ Market rents in Reading were calculated by sampling over all properties for rent within 4 miles of the centre of Reading

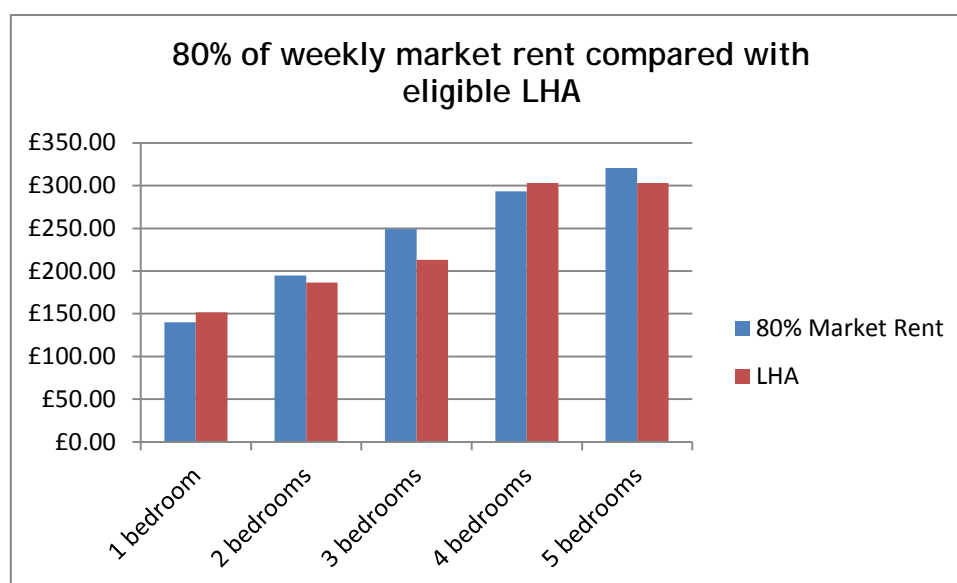
⁶ http://www.home.co.uk/for_rent/reading/current_rents?location=reading

Figure 4 shows the number of social lettings made per year in comparison to the number registered with Homechoice at Reading. The total number of applicants excluding Band F is the number assessed as having a housing need (Bands A-E) and still far outnumbers the number of lettings that are made each year. The option for Council tenants to buy their home by exercising their Right to Buy' reduces the number of Council owned properties which in turn reduces the number of properties available for re-let.⁷

An option for those wishing to rent from a social landlord is a property with an 'affordable rent'. Registered providers are able to charge affordable rents and these are set at up to 80% of the market rent, however this is not necessarily affordable for households on a low income. Figure 5 details the household income required so that housing costs do not equal more than a third of a household's gross income - this is a commonly used ratio to demonstrate whether there is sufficient income to meet basic needs such as utilities and food expenses after housing costs. Figure 6 compares affordable rent (set at 80%) with the weekly eligible rate of Housing Benefit.

| | Market Rent | | | Affordable Rent (set at 80%) | | |
|------------|--------------------------------|------------------|-----------------|------------------------------|----------|-----------------|
| | Average ⁸ per month | Average per Week | Income required | Per month | Per Week | Income required |
| 1 bedroom | £759.00 | £175.15 | £27,600.00 | £607.2 | £140.12 | £22,080.00 |
| 2 bedrooms | £1,056.00 | £243.69 | £38,400.00 | £844.80 | £194.95 | £30,720.00 |
| 3 bedrooms | £1,349.00 | £311.31 | £49,054.55 | £1,079.20 | £249.05 | £39,243.64 |
| 4 bedrooms | £1,589.00 | £366.69 | £57,781.82 | £1,271.20 | £293.35 | £46,225.45 |
| 5 bedrooms | £1,737.00 | £400.85 | £63,163.64 | £1,389.60 | £320.68 | £50,530.91 |

Figure 5 Market rent and resulting affordable rent (where set at 80%) by property size



⁷ <https://righttobuy.gov.uk/about-right-to-buy/>

⁸ http://www.home.co.uk/for_rent/reading/current_rents?location=reading (September 2015)

Figure 6 Weekly affordable rent (where set at 80% of market rent) compared with eligible rate of Local Housing Allowance (LHA) - October 2014

Homelessness

The Council’s Housing Advice Service is responsible for investigating Homelessness applications made under Part VII Housing Act 1996 and the provision of advice and assistance to prevent homelessness. Figure 7 shows the most common reasons for households approaching the Council as homeless to make a homelessness application and demonstrates a significant increase in the last 4 years in the number of households approaching as homeless because they are being asked to leave their private rented housing.

The number of households who are owed a statutory duty for the Council to secure accommodation increased from 80 in 2011/12 to 339 in 2014/15. During 2015/16 there was on average 27 statutory homelessness acceptances made per month. If this level of demand remains the same, without regard to external factors we anticipate that in the year 16/17 there will be 324 households owed a statutory duty of housing. The corresponding impact on access to social housing has caused the proportion of all social lettings to homeless households to increase from 9.5% in 12/13, to 20% in 13/14 and at December 2014 was at 33.8%.

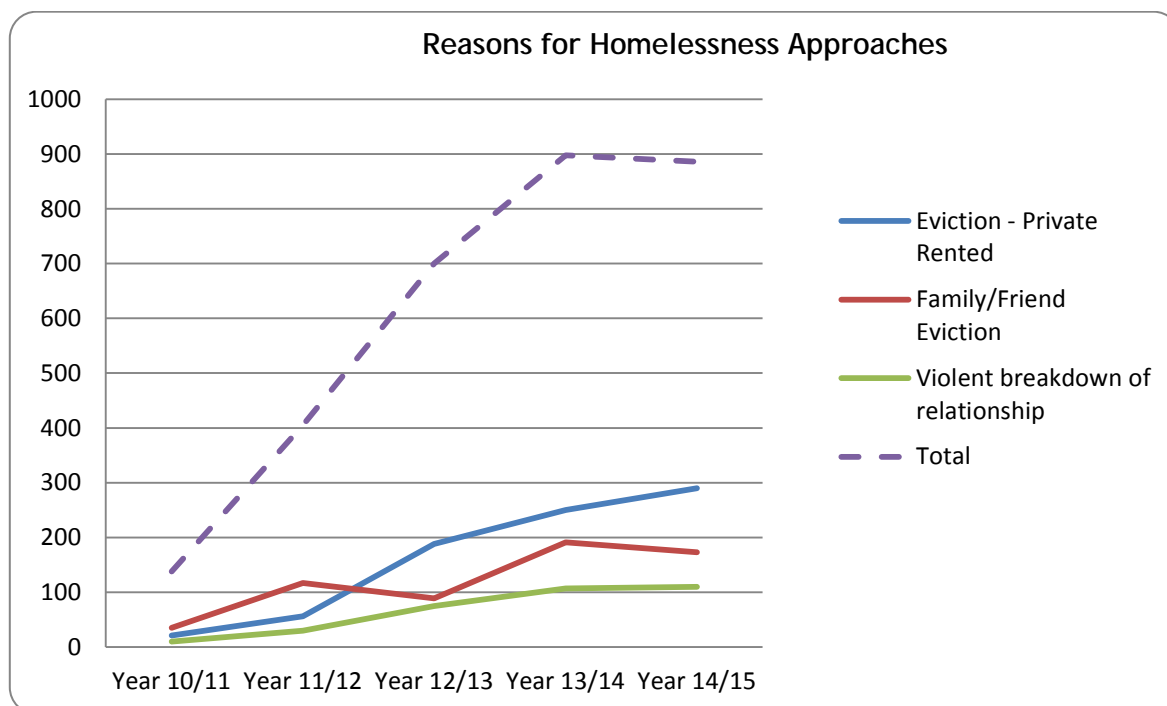


Figure 7 Most common reason for making a homelessness application compared with total number of homelessness applications.

One impact of this increased number of homelessness applications has been a significant increase in the use of emergency accommodation and in particular the number of households living in bed and breakfast (B&B) accommodation. This has

presented new challenges, including having to offer B&B accommodation outside of the Reading borough (resulting in disruption for the households involved in terms of travel to work or school for example) and for maintaining the monitoring of the standard of accommodation used.

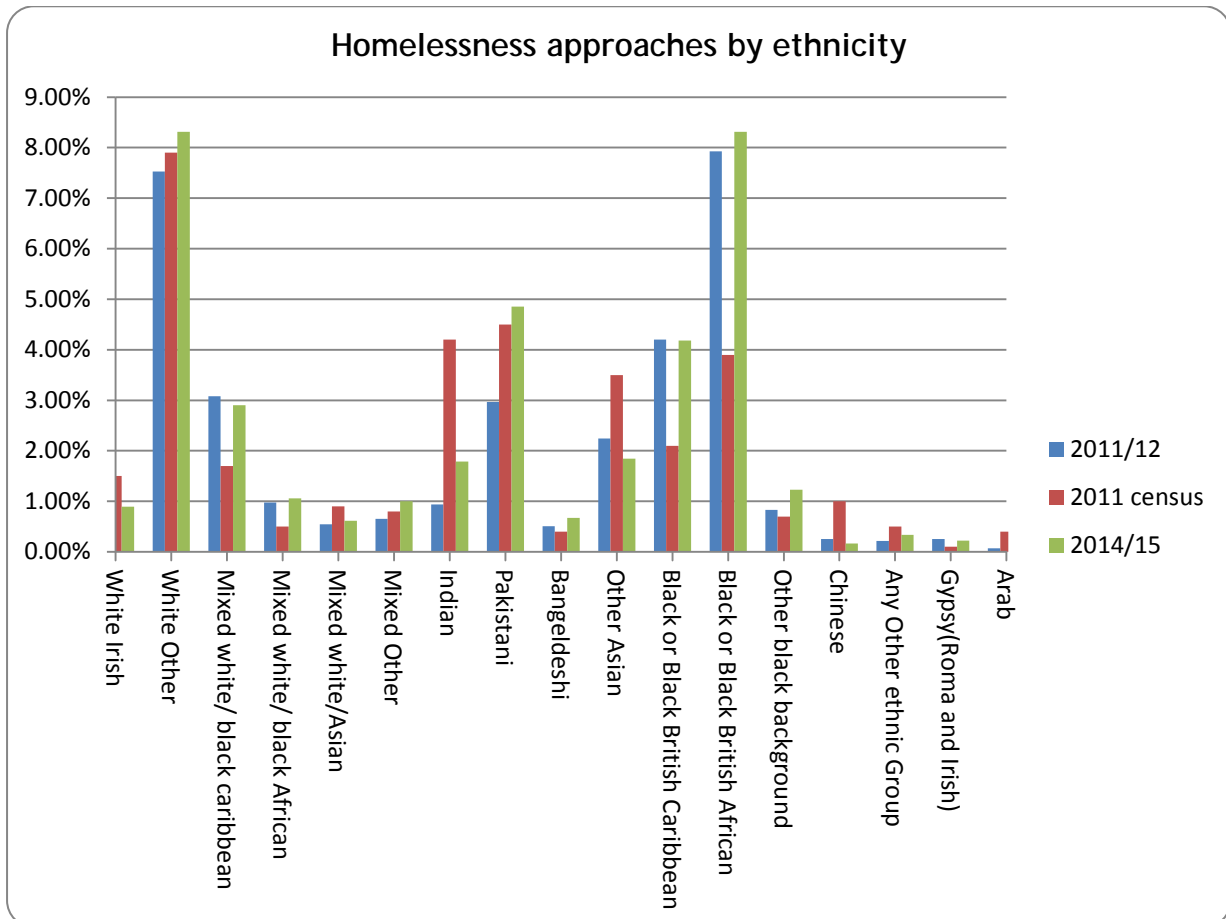


Figure 8 Breakdown of ethnicity in Reading from the 2011 Census in comparison to homelessness approaches by ethnicity in the years 2011/12 and 2014/15 - excluding White British, Unknown and Refused

Reason for homelessness - Eviction from private rented accommodation

As noted above the most common reason for homelessness is eviction from private rented sector (PRS) accommodation. As demonstrated in Figure 3, landlords can secure higher rent levels than those households in receipt of benefits can afford to pay. The amount payable is capped to Local Housing Allowance (LHA) levels, which is only reviewed annually and is not keeping pace with market rates.

Whilst there are high employment rates in Reading, because of the correlation of income to rental costs a sizeable number of working households are also reliant upon benefits to supplement their income in order to pay their rent. In November 2014 28.6% of Housing Benefit claimants living in either private rented or socially rented accommodation in Reading had some earned income. Nationally the number

of LHA claimants in private rented accommodation who are in employment had increased to approximately 556,800⁹ in May 2015 according to the Department of Work and Pensions, an increase of over 100% since the August 2009 figure of approximately 254,100.

Since the publication of Reading's last Homelessness Strategy there have been a number of significant reforms to the welfare benefit system. Those that have had the most significant impact on tenants renting in the PRS include: the introduction of a cap on the total amount of welfare benefits payable (with the excess deducted from the housing element); an increase from 25 to 35 as the age at which most claimants are eligible for a self-contained property; the introduction of Universal Credit (implemented for single people on 21st September 2015), where tenants will have all their benefits paid directly to them in one monthly lump sum.

Universal Credit in particular has caused concerns amongst some landlords nationally that some tenants may find it difficult to manage and prioritise rent payments under the new system. In the current competitive rental market these concerns have contributed to an increasing reluctance for some landlords in the PRS to renew or offer new tenancies to anyone in receipt of benefits.

Reason for homelessness - Family/friend eviction

Homelessness as a result of family and friend evictions has consistently been one of the main reasons for homelessness approaches for a number of years. It represents around 20% of the total homelessness approaches made over the last 3 years. There had been an upward trend in the total number of family and friend evictions that result in a homelessness application being made, however this last financial year has seen a slight decrease in this number.

A common factor leading to family and friend evictions can be linked to the natural expansion of families causing overcrowding; and combined with the increasingly competitive housing market and a build-up of economic pressure within households this can result in homelessness.

Another possible factor to take into consideration in the case of family/friend and PRS evictions could be a perception that the result of a homelessness application will be prioritisation for a social housing tenancy. Social housing is a scarce and desirable resource with demand far outstripping supply; households are understandably desperate to obtain secure, responsibly managed and affordable housing.

This situation risks creating a perverse incentive to households not to address any impending homelessness issue that they may be faced with, potentially inadvertently creating circumstances where households may feel that homelessness is the only chance that there is of being housed in social rented accommodation. Only two thirds of households currently in emergency homelessness accommodation are willing to engage with assistance to resolve their housing situation with offers of private rented accommodation.

⁹ <https://stat-xplore.dwp.gov.uk/>



Reason for homelessness - Violent breakdown of a relationship

Violent relationship breakdown as a reason for homelessness remains a common factor and has shown a significant increase in the last four years. However there is not a corresponding increase in reporting of Domestic Abuse incidents in the borough. Therefore it is felt that the increase in homelessness applications is both as a result of the work that we have already done to increase awareness of housing options and rights for abuse survivors and the reduced overall ability to prevent homelessness by securing alternative accommodation; and this is predominantly due to the pressure on the private rented sector.

Reading Borough Council continues to invest in refuge provision for those leaving their home due to domestic abuse and with 25 refuge places provided in the town Reading has the second highest level of provision in the Thames Valley after Milton Keynes. This has not changed since the previous Homeless Strategy. However refuge provision is not suitable for all households leaving a violent relationship and is not always available which means some are housed in non-specialist temporary accommodation and provided with outreach support. Limitations on this temporary accommodation, combined with the overall pressure on housing supply in the town risk impacting the resilience of survivors leaving a violent relationship.



Progress since the 2008-2013 Preventing Homelessness Strategy

The Homelessness Strategy 2008-2013 established a number of priorities and created a strategic plan of actions for the Council to implement over a 5 year period:

Preventing vulnerable adults from becoming homeless

- ✓ In November 2011 the Council reconfigured our accommodation-based support services to create a 'Homelessness Pathway' (see Appendix Two). By implementing a more effective way of working and better targeting of resource, the number of available beds has increased from 199 to 224 at the same time as reducing the total spend on these services. The Homelessness Pathway has different levels of support to enable homeless people to rebuild their lives and move on into independent living as soon as they are ready. The Pathway describes the journey that service users take through supported accommodation, developing the skills to live independently. The aim of the Pathway approach is to better integrate services to improve outcomes for homeless people, with a focus on personalised progress and recovery.

With 'Access' and 'Move-on' panels coordinating placements in, through and out of provision, the Pathway has led to a consistent approach to service access and support. In the first quarter of 2015/16, 30 individuals were housed into accommodation through the Access Panel.

Since 2013 a pilot project jointly funded by Thames Valley Probation has given the Access Panel a budget for bed and breakfast accommodation. In the first two years this provided 17 and 15 people respectively with emergency accommodation whilst they were waiting for a suitable vacancy in the Homelessness Pathway, so that they are not sleeping rough whilst waiting for a bed and at risk of reoffending, or becoming involved in a dangerous rough sleeping lifestyle.

- ✓ Referrals for floating support services were incorporated into the Homelessness Pathway in April 2013, emphasising the role of housing related support services in preventing homelessness and preventing the need for people to access accommodation services whenever possible.
- ✓ In 2013 an Adult Social Care Housing Panel was created to coordinate housing resources and care packages for adults eligible for social care. 31 people were housed in accommodation more appropriate for their needs in 2014.
- ✓ In 2009 a precariously housed protocol was developed to provide on-going temporary accommodation for vulnerable households with multiple needs who are found to be intentionally homeless but are subsequently positively engaging with all appropriate support services. Five households experiencing



extremely difficult housing situations have been assisted using this option. Of these, one arrangement is on-going and two households had planned moves into more appropriate housing.

- ✓ A Housing Needs Outreach Officer post was introduced in 2010 to establish satellite sessions in the community to increase the awareness of and enable access to Housing Advice services and has created links with community groups across the borough. Regular advice sessions are delivered directly to people using services where there may be corresponding housing issues such as drug and alcohol treatment and for women at risk of offending. The post also provides specialist advice on preventing homelessness to community workers and strategy groups including for sex workers and Gypsies, Roma and Travellers.

Strengthening partnerships to prevent homelessness

- ✓ Working with our partner agencies is integral to preventing homelessness and we have strived throughout the period of the last Homelessness Strategy to improve and maintain effective working relationships and create clear pathways of communication in the interest of preventing homelessness. Housing Services is a core member of a number of multiagency initiatives including with partners in criminal justice as part of integrated offender management and with community safety targeting street based antisocial behaviour such as begging and street drinking; ensuring that housing options and opportunities for the prevention of homelessness are considered as part of holistic support packages.
- ✓ A protocol between the Council's Housing Services and Thames Valley Probation was implemented in 2012; this made provision for a specialist role within the Housing Advice Service and created a named point of contact between both services.

The purpose of this protocol is to reduce homelessness amongst people released from custody and those under probation supervision orders. It aims to ensure there is a joint response between the Council and National Probation Service when working with offenders with a housing issue.

The protocol sets out a common approach to ensure a consistent service is provided across both service areas; with the aim of intervening early in order to prevent homelessness or enabling access to suitable accommodation.

Preventing families and young people from becoming homeless

- ✓ Safeguarding children is everyone's responsibility and we have made - and will continue to make - all efforts to safeguard children.
- ✓ The Young Persons Housing Support Panel was set up as a multiagency panel to agree housing and support options for young people at risk of homelessness with a focus on opportunities for service interventions to

prevent homelessness. The panel is an opportunity for Housing Services and Children's Social Care to take an active approach to access to the two specialist young people's accommodation services provided at the YMCA and Young Parents Project.

- ✓ Housing Services play a key role in attendance at multiagency meetings to identify and offer prevention solutions to families at risk of homelessness.
- ✓ A 'crash pad' was created as a short term assessment bed using a spare room in YMCA. This was successful for some time until a reconfiguration at the hostel meant the room was no longer available. The crash pad became a mechanism to make emergency referrals to the YMCA where there is capacity in the service.
- ✓ The number of 16 and 17 years olds approaching the Housing Advice Service has reduced and currently represent just 3% of the total number of homelessness approaches to Reading Borough Council. This reduction is doubtless in part due to the enhanced partnership approach developed between the Council's Housing and Children's Services and the targeting of preventative services such as the Children's Action Teams and Housing Floating Support services to help families with managing their accommodation and the prevention of homelessness.

Moving people away from rough sleeping

- ✓ Reading Borough Council commissions a proactive street outreach team to engage with rough sleepers and support them into housing and a new three year contract was awarded for his service in January 2014. This service housed over 1,000 rough sleepers between the publication of the last Homelessness Strategy in July 2009 and the end of the last financial year 2013/14.
- ✓ The Reading Street Guide is a colour, pocket-sized guide to available information, support and services in Reading that may be relevant to anyone who is at risk of rough sleeping. It was renewed by the Council in 2011 and has been updated and republished annually since and widely distributed both to service users and advisers.

Preventing homelessness arising from Domestic Abuse

- ✓ The Council commissions and funds the voluntary sector to provide local refuge as well as outreach support to survivors of domestic abuse including households in emergency bed and breakfast.
- ✓ The Sanctuary Scheme has been in place since 2009 and was reviewed and renewed in 2014. The scheme offers another choice for survivors of domestic abuse who wish to remain in their own homes but need some adaptations to make the property safer. Funding is available for additional security measures, from lock changes to ensuring the property has a safe



room, and is one of the options considered by the MARAC (Multi-Agency Risk Assessment Conference).

- ✓ Housing Services is a core member at MARAC and officers in the Housing Advice Service receive specialist training.
- ✓ The Domestic Abuse Housing protocol was reviewed in 2014 to provide a clear and consistent offer from Housing Services to survivors of domestic abuse. Domestic Abuse remains a strategic priority for Reading Borough Council and the Domestic Abuse Strategy is being reviewed and launched early in 2015.

Accessing affordable housing

- ✓ Ensuring a supply of good quality, secure and affordable housing to meet identified local housing needs is a key priority for Reading Borough Council. We have worked to improve housing standards in the private rented sector and all prospective properties for the Deposit Guarantee Scheme are inspected to ensure the appropriate standards are met.
- ✓ Building new Social housing is an important way of increasing the supply of affordable homes - rent levels and the type of tenancy offered are within the Council's control to enable supply to best meet local need. 774 affordable homes have been delivered by Registered Social Landlords since 2008.
- ✓ Occupancy levels within the Council's housing stock have improved by reducing the time taken to re-let void properties - turnaround of Council homes will continue to be a focus through the period of the 2016-2021 Homelessness Strategy.
- ✓ In response to removal of the spare room subsidy a specialist post was created to provide advice and assistance to affected households so that they were in a position to budget effectively and had assistance to move to more affordable accommodation if they chose. The Council has organised two 'Home Swap' events to match under-occupiers with households that are overcrowded.
- ✓ Registered Provider Forums are held regularly to ensure communication and discussion of measures to aid in the prevention of homelessness.



Homelessness Strategy 2016-2021 - Our Priorities

Extensive examination and analysis of demand and trends in the causes of homelessness, opportunities for homelessness prevention, service provision and gaps in services has informed the basis for our priorities for Reading's Homelessness Strategy 2016-21.

A number of workshops with those responsible for delivering the action plan for our previous Homelessness Strategy identified the key areas of focus for an initial round of consultation with key stakeholders via questionnaire. Residents who had used homelessness services were encouraged to contribute through workshops arranged as part of existing service user groups.

A final series of stakeholder workshops and review of the latest available data on homelessness in Reading (and the wider influences on the local situation) has led to the identification of three key strategic priorities for this Homelessness Strategy:

- Increase the use and accessibility of the private rented sector
- Prevent homelessness by supporting people to access housing and to sustain their accommodation
- Increase the range and accessibility of information and advice available to enable people to make informed decisions about their housing situation

We will review the Homelessness Strategy annually so that it is responsive to emerging needs. The accompanying Homelessness Strategy Delivery Plan assigns responsibility and timeframes for actions so that progress can be monitored. Key milestones in achieving the strategic priorities provide a framework to ensure that the Homelessness Strategy and the Delivery Plan are robust.

We will periodically publish an updated Delivery Plan on our website so that stakeholders and residents can see progress and achievements. The Reading Homelessness Forum - once established as one of the actions from this Homelessness Strategy - will share information and target resources so that there is multiagency engagement and a partnership approach to its delivery.

The Homelessness Strategy 2016-2021 will contribute to the service priorities set out in the Council's Corporate Plan 2015-18¹⁰:

- Safeguarding and protecting those that are most vulnerable, and
- Providing homes for those in most need.

¹⁰ http://beta.reading.gov.uk/media/2634/Corporate-Plan-2015-18/pdf/Corporate_Plan_2015-18_FINAL.pdf

Priority One: Increase the use and accessibility of the private rented sector

A quarter of Reading's households live in private rented accommodation. Private rented accommodation affords households choice and flexibility, for example choice of property type or of location to meet work or school travel commitments.

Consultation for this strategy with stakeholders confirmed that a key area of concern was the availability and accessibility of affordable and decent standard private rented accommodation.

Households on a low income face some particular challenges accessing private rented accommodation as the cost of privately renting in Reading has increased. Demand for private rented accommodation locally is fuelled not only by the buoyant economy but also fewer households buying property, the student and young professional markets and households moving out of London to seek more affordable accommodation - all competing with those on a lower income.

The Deposit Guarantee Scheme (DGS) is the Council's service to support residents to access private rented accommodation and prevent homelessness. The Council acts as a tenant's guarantor and will pay the landlord for any damage (beyond fair wear and tear) or rent arrears up to the value of a month's rent. Tenants save for their own deposit during the course of their tenancy so that if they choose to move on they have their own deposit with which to do so. The DGS run successful pre-tenancy training workshops which are delivered to support households to find properties and provide financial advice to help them to maintain their tenancy.

Since 2013 it has become increasingly more difficult to procure new properties for the DGS. The number of new tenancies secured through the DGS has decreased significantly from 456 in 2011/12 to 239 in 2013/14. A consultation with landlords in November 2012 found that 17% of DGS landlords were no longer willing to work with the scheme because they wanted to charge rents higher than those available to tenants claiming Local Housing Allowance.

Eviction from private rented accommodation is now the number one cause of homelessness in Reading. This is also having a significant impact on our ability to prevent homelessness and many more households have to move into emergency and temporary accommodation instead.

We have to increase the use and accessibility of the private rented sector to meet the needs of homeless households.

What we want to achieve:

- Reduce the number of households living in Bed and Breakfast and other types of emergency and temporary accommodation
- Reduce the number of households becoming homeless because of the end of their private rented accommodation

- Enable more efficient move on from the Homelessness Pathway (thus creating opportunities for more people to access supported accommodation)

In order to achieve this we will:

Enhance the Deposit Guarantee Scheme

An initial review of the DGS recommended that changes should be made to build on the strengths of the current scheme to ensure continued viability in an increasingly competitive market, to retain its current landlords and expand the landlord base. We need to make enhancements so that an attractive, sustainable financial product can be offered to landlords through the DGS.

We have developed the scheme to incentivise landlords and make the most appealing offer for landlords and customers and now offer a guaranteed rent product with the aim to increase the supply of DGS properties and enable us to provide more suitable accommodation to meet the needs of homeless households.

The new Rent Guarantee Scheme was re-launched in September 2015, the marketing for which will be further developed, including a stronger web presence, the use of online tools and social media to raise awareness and encourage more landlords to join the scheme.

Over the course of this strategy we will continue to review and enhance this scheme in response to the private sector market and in line with priorities for landlords.

End the homelessness duty by way of a private rented sector offer

The power now exists as a result of the Localism Act 2011 for a Local Authority to bring this duty to an end by a suitable offer of private rented accommodation and household consent for the duty to end in this way is no longer required.

The increase in homelessness has had a significant impact on the overall demand for social housing and the availability of accommodation for households on the Housing Register with other housing needs.

It is planned to explore the option to utilise our discretionary powers to fulfil duties to statutory homeless households through the provision of suitable vetted private rented accommodation through the Rent Guarantee Scheme. This would allow a more flexible approach to meeting local housing demands. By taking this approach we will be able to ensure that homeless households spend as little time as possible in temporary accommodation or bed and breakfast whilst relieving the pressure on the Housing Register.

Any offer of private rented accommodation would be subject to a Suitability of Accommodation Order. In making this offer the proximity to employment, education, support or caring responsibilities will be taken into account. In addition to this, we would ensure the property meets the required standards and is compliant with health and safety regulations. The approach would be subject to

regular monitoring and review in terms of the outcomes for the, often vulnerable, households involved.

Develop a Council Owned Housing Company

To further provide realistic options for households seeking alternative accommodation, Reading Borough Council will investigate the viability of establishing a housing company with a portfolio of properties let within the private rented sector. The company, wholly owned by the Council, will predominately purchase properties which will then be let at a mixture of rent levels. The range of rent levels, include a percentage of properties being let at market value, will enable the company to be sustainable without external financial support being required. A proportion of these properties will be let at Local Housing Allowance levels for the area, thus making them affordable for low income households reliant on Housing Benefit.

These properties will be made available to households in need of support from the local authority to access accommodation via the Rent Guarantee Scheme, and will therefore support both the prevention of homelessness and discharge of the Council's statutory homelessness duty. This will directly reduce the number of households that require temporary accommodation.

Provide additional advice and support to private sector landlords

We currently provide DGS landlords with advice and support in relation to welfare benefits, tenancy agreements and any other issues surrounding the tenancy. We regularly contact and consult with landlords, especially those renting through the DGS and we hold annual landlord forums to provide an opportunity for feedback as well as information sharing on legislative changes.

Whilst our Housing Advice Service already has some capacity to provide private sector landlords with tenancy advice, consultation with landlords has highlighted a need for the advisory service from the DGS team to be extended to all private sector landlords.

We will extend the capacity of the DGS to provide tenancy advice to all private sector landlords with support from the Housing Advice Service. The service will deliver a comprehensive, customer orientated, confidential advice and support service for private sector landlords so that we create and maintain excellent working relationships with private sector landlords in order to raise standards of practice and accommodation and maximise opportunities for preventing homelessness. The service will also develop, support and promote the Council's Housing Services' initiatives in the private rented sector.

We will provide information to private sector landlords on referral mechanisms for floating support services so that tenants at risk of homelessness can be referred for help before a notice to leave is issued.

The DGS has successfully held training sessions for landlords and consultation emphasised the positive response to these sessions. We will arrange further

training sessions for private sector landlords to cover important issues in the sector.

We will improve the provision of advice for landlords and tenants by utilising our website as well as the creation of more factsheets to provide updates on legislative changes.

Inform the private rented market to help meet the needs of all households

The increased need to use bed and breakfast as emergency accommodation has resulted in more households living in accommodation that is unsuitable, for example because they are sharing washing facilities or cooking facilities are shared or limited. We will work with landlords to identify options to convert existing bed and breakfast units into self-contained annexes, particularly for homeless families with children.

We will further expand our offer to private sector landlords to provide advice on the types of accommodation required to meet the needs of all households, including: self-contained nightly accommodation for homeless families; suitable accommodation for young people; and adults with support needs.

Increase the availability of suitable temporary accommodation for homeless households

The use of bed and breakfast for homeless households has increased significantly in the 18 months prior to the publication of this Homelessness Strategy. The use of bed and breakfast is unanimously acknowledged as unsuitable for long periods of time and Government guidance states that they should only be used in an emergency and are unsuitable for young people.

A February 2015 report by the NSPCC in partnership with the Anna Freud Centre¹¹ found that a baby's development can be affected where homelessness accommodation lacks the safety, cleanliness or facilities required by babies in order to thrive.

We will develop alternatives to bed and breakfast accommodation, especially for young people, so that this kind of accommodation is only ever used in an emergency. We will explore all options for increasing the available units of paid nightly self-contained accommodation and temporary accommodation. We will work with private rented sector landlords to help ensure vacancy availability and ensure standards are high. We will ensure that temporary accommodation options explored will take into account the needs of households with disabilities.

In particular we will:

- **Explore options to provide additional temporary accommodation through private sector leasing**

¹¹ <http://www.nspcc.org.uk/globalassets/documents/research-reports/all-babies-count-unstable-start.pdf>

In order to add to the existing pool of available temporary accommodation we will explore options to procure leased accommodation from the private rented sector to meet the needs of homeless households. Landlords could be offered short term leasing options (3 - 5 years) where the Council will provide all property management functions.

It is intended that this will complement existing schemes by providing an alternative option to landlords who may wish to let their property without significant involvement, whilst allowing the local authority to increase the market from which we are able to procure property.

➤ **Develop additional units of temporary accommodation**

To further support the objective of reducing the use of Bed and Breakfast units, additional temporary accommodation will be developed. Reading Borough Council will look to utilise suitable sites that it owns to directly develop suitable temporary accommodation. Opportunities to support and or work with partners in the community to bring appropriate facilities on-line will also be explored. This will include the potential use of units constructed off site due to their lower construction costs and faster development process.

For all options, wherever possible we will endeavour to secure temporary accommodation within Reading to limit the impact of having to move outside of the borough. In line with guidance¹² from the Department for Communities and Local Government, we will take into account the need to minimise disruption to the education of young people, particularly at critical points in time such as leading up to taking GCSE (or their equivalent) examinations, when discharging our temporary accommodation duty to homeless households with children. The Council will continue to work with all other services involved with a family, and in particular schools, to sustain attendance and maintain children's attainment in education.

Support mobility

In some situations households want to explore housing options outside of the Reading borough area - this could be to move closer to support networks, for work opportunities or to an area that is more affordable for them.

We will discuss opportunities with households if they want to move to another area, we will help them to apply for financial assistance and provide advice to support a household's choice to move out of the borough. We will help ensure that a household's decision to move is sustainable by advising and assisting access to local Council, employment and other support services.

Utilise Discretionary Housing Payments to prevent homelessness

¹²

https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/270376/130108_Supplementary_Guidance_on_the_Homelessness_changes_in_the_Localism_Act_2011_and_on_the_Homelessness_Order_2012.pdf



Discretionary Housing Payments (DHP) may be awarded in addition to any welfare benefits when the Council considers that a claimant requires further financial assistance towards housing costs. Housing costs includes rental liability, rent in advance, deposits and other lump sum costs associated with a housing need such as removal costs.

The Government contribution towards DHP decreased from £526,806 in 2014/15 to £359,568 in 2015/16 and given the reduced funding environment there is the risk that this could reduce further in the future.

We will continue to facilitate and monitor DHP as a measure employed to prevent homelessness. We will promote the use of DHP to encourage applications to support move on from Homelessness Pathway and temporary accommodation.

Working to improve standards in the private rented sector

Many homes in the private rented sector (PRS) provide good quality housing which is managed well by landlords and agents. However, in some cases, the sector can be seen as offering poor security of tenure which is managed poorly.

The Council has set out an approach to work to improve standards in the PRS where needed through education, partnership and where necessary enforcement. An action plan has been developed to enable the delivery of this approach, including a draft PRS Charter, which aims to build a common understanding of values, standards and requirements for the rental sector. Housing Services will work alongside Regulatory Services to help deliver the action plan.



Priority Two: Prevent homelessness by supporting people to access housing and to sustain their accommodation

Our consultation with stakeholders and service users told us that some people not only struggle with the skills they need to manage their accommodation, but also need extra support to access the services that are available to help them to do so.

We recognise that securing and successfully sustaining accommodation is more difficult for some and that appropriate housing can provide a vital platform for people with additional needs to engage with the help and support they want and to progress in all aspects of their lives.

We already invest significantly in the provision of homelessness prevention and support services for vulnerable people, including the commissioning of over 200 bed spaces in the Homelessness Pathway, a rough sleeper street outreach team and floating support to prevent homelessness in the community. This is in addition to our own very proactive approach to money and debt advice support for Council and Deposit Guarantee Scheme tenants or any other residents at risk of homelessness.

We need to continue to expand and embed our work with partner organisations in order to secure an offer of accessible and personalised support to vulnerable households who are homeless or at risk of homelessness.

To succeed in this objective we have to raise the profile of these households and the opportunities and benefits for statutory, commissioned, voluntary and community services to identify and engage with them.

What we want to achieve:

- Reduce the number of people who are newly identified sleeping rough
- Reduce the number of formerly homeless people returning to rough sleeping
- Reduce the number of households living in emergency and temporary accommodation - especially bed and breakfast
- Increase the stability of accommodation for households with additional needs
- Reduce the number of families found to be intentionally homeless

In order to achieve this we will:

Coordinate services for residents with multiple needs and/or exclusions from services

We know that there are some people in Reading who have experienced repeated homelessness and have had ineffective contact and engagement with support services. Housing and homelessness services cannot address this alone, rather the inability to sustain accommodation is usually one symptom of experiencing a number of other problems at the same time, including problematic drug and alcohol use, unemployment, mental ill health and offending; and these problems

are often related to childhood and domestic abuse, bereavement and other traumatic life experiences.

There are a number of very successful multiagency panels, case management groups, forums, case conferencing and escalation processes in Reading (see Appendix 1). We know that some households might be supported by a number of these at the same time and that there are more opportunities to develop the overall strategic monitoring of needs and trends through these meetings. We will carry out a review exercise of these meetings including mapping the access, escalation routes and ownership so that households involved with a number of services receive a consistent approach.

Often the first contact with Housing services is when a person is already homeless, or sleeping rough, or when a family's difficulties in their current accommodation have become intractable.

We will continue to develop a coordinated approach with our partners in the drug and alcohol, criminal justice, employment, health and other services to identify vulnerable households at risk of homelessness and intervene with an offer of personalised support from the most appropriate services.

We will promote innovation and best practice in tailoring services for vulnerable households. We will use outcomes and learning from our local initiatives such as the Priority Treatment Group and the Personalisation project. Working within the commissioning cycle we will introduce Psychologically Informed Environments¹³ in all of our homelessness support services.

We will develop our monitoring activities, including on the reasons why people sleep rough and why families are found to be intentionally homeless, and identify opportunities for early intervention and support. We will use outcomes from this support to review the service offer for vulnerable people and ensure that our services are accessible and planned and developed so that they meet the needs of residents with multiple needs.

Improve support pathways for victims of domestic abuse

Commissioned by Reading Borough Council, support is currently provided by Berkshire Women's Aid (BWA) for survivors to access refuges, find alternative accommodation or remain in their own home. Protocols between BWA and the Council's Housing Advice Service ensure that this support is available to everyone who approaches Reading Borough Council for housing as a result of Domestic Abuse. A key objective in the draft Reading Borough Council Domestic Abuse Strategy is to ensure that all referral pathways are clearly mapped and promoted to all services.

In order to provide effective support, the Council has continued to make significant investment in refuge and outreach provision to ensure that victims can be made safe immediately following identification and any disclosure of Domestic

¹³ <http://www.rjaconsultancy.org.uk/PIEconcept.html>

Abuse. As part of our commissioning cycle, and to understand the demand and pressures for this service, we will review the current provision to ensure the right resources are in place and that we continue to provide a service that meets the needs of Reading residents.

We will continue to support and enable survivors of domestic abuse to remain in their own homes where it is safe and they choose to do so. We will continue and monitor use of the Sanctuary Scheme, providing additional security measures so that a household can return or remain at home.

This work links to the Domestic Abuse Strategy for Reading 2015-2018¹⁴.

Develop new partnership arrangement and joint working protocols with the new probation structure, to ensure the needs of offenders are met

In March 2013 the Ministry of Justice announced a programme of reform to the National Probation Service, *Transforming Rehabilitation*, making fundamental changes to how offenders are managed in the community. A key element to this programme is the introduction of Community Rehabilitation Companies (CRCs) to take over elements of responsibility from the statutory body, the National Probation Service (NPS), creating two organisations.

We have an effective protocol with Thames Valley Probation which we will renew and develop to create a new joint working protocol with both the NPS and the CRC. We will establish clear and effective pathways of communication and service access to ensure the housing needs of offenders are taken into account. The protocol with Thames Valley Probation secures that offenders who are stable and able to sustain their own independent accommodation can access the Rent Guarantee Scheme outside of some of the usual access criteria and we aim to continue this arrangement with NPS and the CRC. The protocol will be reviewed at least annually and contain mechanisms to monitor housing and reconviction outcomes.

Transforming Rehabilitation introduced measures to extend supervision of offenders to those receiving short term sentences, increasing the number of individuals being supported by the NPS and CRC on release from prison. We will use this as an opportunity to work closely with our partners across the Criminal Justice System to reduce the risk of homelessness for short term prisoners.

The new supervision arrangements only apply to offences committed after 1st February 2015 so at the time of writing it is not yet clear what the level or type of need will be for homelessness prevention activities. We do know that in July 2014 just under a third of those subject to Probation supervision had accommodation identified as a criminogenic need and short term prisoners are at risk of not being able to return to where they were staying and homelessness on release. The CRC will monitor numbers of offenders and instances of homelessness and review these in partnership with the Council's Housing Services.

¹⁴http://www.reading.gov.uk/media/4335/Domestic-Abuse-Strategy-Nov-2015/pdf/DA_Strategy_final.pdf - 18/pdf/Reading's_Draft_Domestic_Abuse_Strategy_2015-18.pdf

We will develop links with the provider responsible for assessing short term prisoners at HMPs Bronzefield and Bullingdon so that any housing issues are identified early on and appropriate advice and guidance can be provided.

Develop the coordination and availability of services for people at risk of homelessness due to financial difficulties

We deliver and fund a number of Council and community based services to support people with financial difficulties, including a Money and Debt Advice service based in the Council's Housing Services and available cross-tenure to anyone who is at risk of homelessness.

As the Government makes fundamental changes to the welfare benefit system, including the introduction of Universal Credit, we have to be increasingly aware and proactive in mitigating the connection this could have with homelessness.

We will consider the scope of available budgeting advice and test if there are any gaps in the type of advice and information available, its accessibility and scope. In partnership with all other providers of money advice we will promote these services to residents, landlords and other stakeholders.

Implement a new floating support service to prevent homelessness

'Floating support' is support delivered in people's own homes and in the community, to help residents to sustain their accommodation through developing their capacity to live independently. This can include support to manage money and reduce debt, get help for drug and alcohol problems or access employment, education and training opportunities.

We have already introduced two multiagency access points for floating support services (one for single people and one for families) in order to monitor level and type of need, prioritise resources, monitor outcomes and identify and share best practice. We have used the learning from this to implement the new service, reducing the number of providers from three to one.

Wherever possible the service will enable residents to remain in their own homes and gain the skills required to sustain their tenancies effectively into the future. In order to maximise the number of people who can access this support, the service will offer classes, workshops and group work covering activities such as accessing private rented sector accommodation and tenancy sustainment.

Volunteers, including peer mentors, will add capacity to the service whilst contributing skills and knowledge from personal experience, flexibility in working practices, dedication and empathy. The service will develop a network of peer mentoring, support and peer-led activities and promote a culture of value in the benefits to volunteers and beneficiaries of peer involvement in service delivery.

The implementation has included publicity of the aims and remit of the service with statutory and voluntary services, social and private landlords and Reading

residents at large. Protocols have been put in place with key partners including health and criminal justice services in order to secure that referral processes and information sharing are clear and robust.

Continued development of the service and will be a key achievement for the new strategy.

Supporting Troubled Families to sustain suitable accommodation

The Troubled Families programme was launched in 2012 with the aim of supporting 120,000 families nationally by May 2015. To be eligible to enter the programme, families had to meet three of the four criteria:

1. are involved in youth crime or anti-social behaviour
2. have children who are regularly truanting or not in school
3. have an adult on out of work benefits
4. cause high costs to the taxpayer

Reading Borough Council is on track to achieving improved outcomes for all 345 families supported in Phase One of the programme. From 2015 the scheme is being expanded and funding made available for a further 400,000 families nationally, equating to a further 1,220 Reading families.

A key area of activity for Phase Two of the programme will be the sustainment of suitable accommodation for families who are homeless or living in temporary accommodation.

Improve coordination with Registered Providers regarding those at risk of Homelessness

In addition to approximately 7,000 Council homes there are just under 4,000 social housing properties within Reading managed by over 20 different Registered Providers. Along with Reading Borough Council these Registered Providers are landlords to many of the most vulnerable individuals and families living in the town, and many families on a low income. Therefore it is critical that we work closely with Registered Providers to ensure that all social landlords in the town work together in partnership to prevent homelessness.

We will continue and develop the 'Registered Provider forum' that is facilitated by Reading Borough Council in order to share best practice. In addition we will set up clear protocols with relevant Housing Management Teams so that referrals to the Council's Housing Advice Service are completed for any social housing tenant at risk of homelessness. This will ensure that the Registered Provider, as well as the tenant, has access to timely advice and support as to how to prevent a household from losing their accommodation.

Renew the current Access Panel and Homelessness Pathway processes

The Homelessness Pathway and Access Panel have resulted in an increased opportunity to monitor our commissioned services to ensure consistency of



support, value for money, measureable outcomes for customers and to implement service improvements.

Partly as a result of the success of these arrangements in offering accommodation and support to single homeless people, the Access Panel receives many more referrals than there is available provision. An average 24 individuals are referred for support every month and on average 10 of these are offered accommodation. One effect of this is an increase in the time that individuals who are in housing need have to wait for a suitable vacancy, potentially affecting the stability in other aspects of their lives.

We will review the Access Panel process and develop existing monitoring information so that there is a clear service offer available for the most vulnerable single homeless people, including rough sleepers. The review will take into account the value for money and level of performance of current commissioning arrangements. We will explore opportunities to offer a service in line with the principles of *No Second Night Out*¹⁵. We will review the available provision for those who are found newly rough sleeping and the viability of adapting existing resource for use as emergency or 'assessment' beds so that an effective local approach is in place to tackle and prevent rough sleeping.

In order to do this we also have to address the level of demand and whenever viable we will use our support resource to prevent or by securing other statutory or community support. This will include the consideration of joint commissioning options.

In 2016 we will deliver a commissioning strategy for the accommodation-based services in the Pathway to inform the next phase of development for these services, including how to provide effective services for homeless people with multiple needs and readiness for any further changes to welfare benefit payments, including the position on exempt housing benefit. We will review national and local best practice to ensure that the support and provision type and availability are suitable for females, couples, those with limited mobility and people with dogs.

Consider breadth of housing support services and pathways available for young people

We have already begun a joint project between the Council's Housing and Children's Services to review housing and support provision for 16 and 17 year olds. Feedback from the consultation on this Strategy confirmed that some stakeholders see a need for a more diverse provision for this group. Because of their vulnerability or other special requirements not all young people are able to engage successfully in existing services. Arrangements for young people leaving care will also form part of this work.

The Council's Housing Services will continue to work closely with Children's Services and regularly review the Protocol for assessing and meeting the needs of homeless 16/17 year olds and further reduce the number of young people who

¹⁵ https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/6261/1939099.pdf

become homeless and ensure that it remains compliant with the G. vs Southwark judgement. The Council will ensure that whenever possible there is an alternative to bed and breakfast accommodation in instances where homelessness cannot be prevented and will undertake to ensure that in any case bed and breakfast is not used for 16 and 17 year olds.

The Council will carry out a cross service review of the existing Young Persons Panel to ensure it is effective and is achieving positive outcomes for young people.

Establish a Reading Homelessness Forum

We will establish a Reading Homelessness Forum to share information and target resources and so that there is multiagency oversight and engagement and a partnership approach to the delivery of this Homelessness Strategy.

The forums will be regular and inclusive and reflect the diversity of services and service users and include: partners in statutory services such as social care, probation and health; providers and commissioned services; voluntary, community and faith based organisations.



Priority Three: Increase the range and accessibility of information and advice available to enable people to make informed decisions about their housing situation

Homelessness legislation places a general duty on housing authorities to ensure that advice and information about homelessness, and preventing homelessness, is available to everyone in their district free of charge¹⁶.

We know that if residents have access to the best information and advice so that they can make informed choices at the right time, then homelessness can be prevented. We have to make sure that this information and advice is accessible to all, available across appropriate media and is current and relevant.

We will contribute to wider Reading Borough Council strategic documents to ensure that consideration is given to actions that support the prevention of homelessness.

The Care Act 2014 requires local authorities to ensure that information and advice to prevent or delay the need for social care or support is available in the right format, gives choice and control and is accessible for the whole population; the activities under this priority will help meet this duty and identify residents who are not currently using social care services to whom the new 'wellbeing principle' is especially relevant. The provision of information and advice to secure or sustain appropriate housing can be vital in order to prevent or delay the need for social care.

What we want to achieve:

- Reduced number of approaches to the Council's Housing Advice Service at the point of a housing crisis
- Fewer households living in emergency and temporary accommodation

In order to achieve this we will:

Refresh the information available on homelessness and provision of personalised housing advice on the Reading Borough Council website

We will introduce a personalised online response for applicants to Homechoice at Reading, providing enhanced housing options. Applicants will be referred to other online resources and receive written advice on their housing situation, including rights and responsibilities in the private rented sector and adjusting to any impacts from reforms to the welfare benefit system.

We will work with our customers and stakeholders to test and evaluate the form and type of information we make available online about housing options and homelessness to ensure excellent customer journeys. Our aim will be to enable access to accurate information so that residents are able to make positive choices

¹⁶ *Homelessness Code of Guidance* (2006) Department for Communities and Local Government

about their housing before there is any risk of homelessness. We will keep the Reading Services Guide¹⁷ up to date with information on homelessness services.

We will support the objectives of our Digital Strategy 2013-16¹⁸ by developing our online housing advice so that we minimise avoidable contact and duplication of information requests and we maximise the speed, efficiency and quality of customer service delivery.

We will promote access to community resources such as libraries where internet access is available for homeless people without access to a computer.

Ensure information regarding homelessness is available at sufficient and appropriate locations across Reading

A key theme that emerged from consultation with residents that had previously used homelessness services was the difficulty they had in finding information about the support available either before or during a housing crisis. Many felt that if this information had been more widely available, and it was made clear that people can access support before they were to become homeless, this would have had a significant impact on their situation and may have prevented them from losing their accommodation.

We will work with key statutory and voluntary partners in the town such as offender services and homelessness support services to ensure that those that they work with have access to information about the support available to people. The literature available will be reviewed and tailored to the locations to ensure that it meets both the clients and the service's requirements, for example information designed specifically for young people. A systematic campaign regarding publicity of available support services will then be developed and supported by additional training for agencies that may advise clients face to face or online.

Prioritise availability of outreach activity for vulnerable residents most at risk of homelessness

One outcome of our Preventing Homelessness Strategy 2008-2013 was the creation of a Housing Needs Outreach post delivering housing advice in the community. This service is still very effective at engaging with residents who are at risk of homelessness but are less likely to choose to access statutory services, including vulnerable women at risk of offending and people with drug and alcohol problems.

The Outreach post also acts as a 'community contact' and point of access for Housing Services for a number of community groups, including through the Indian and Pakistan Community Centres, the Nepalese and Polish communities and the West Indian Women's Circle. As demonstrated in Figure 8 above however, some BME groups are still over-represented in Reading's homelessness figures.

¹⁷ <http://servicesguide.reading.gov.uk>

¹⁸ *Digital Strategy 2013-2016* (2013) Reading Borough Council/Socitm Ltd



We will develop our outreach activity to raise awareness of the needs of the BME community and prevent homelessness by ensuring the provision of culturally sensitive housing advice and information. We will work with community and voluntary groups to promote and support the establishment of “community champions” where appropriate or similar networks of peer-led advocacy, linking in to existing community development services.

In addition we will expand the provision of pre-tenancy training delivered by the Rent Guarantee Scheme to households that may not be eligible for the Scheme.

There are a significant number of households in Reading who may be supported with accommodation by Social Care teams as they do not qualify for housing assistance. We will work in partnership with social care to target intentionally homeless households and those with otherwise limited Housing options, to develop the skills and knowledge to resolve their housing issues.

Proactively contact those that we know might be at risk of homelessness

One tranche of our response to mitigating any negative impacts of welfare reform on homelessness has been the creation of specialist posts to identify and support specific households. Those impacted by the change to the shared room rate, the benefit cap and the removal of the spare room subsidy have been contacted and offered personalised advice and information.

We will continue to closely monitor the impacts of current and any future changes to the welfare benefit system, including, further reductions to the cap of overall benefits and be proactive in ensuring that support is available for any vulnerable households who may be at risk of homelessness due to national changes to the benefits system. We will work closely with partners in JobCentre Plus and local employment and financial support services to mitigate the impact of welfare reforms.

We will continue to offer personalised advice and referrals (for example for budgeting advice or employment support) for those impacted by the benefit cap and prioritise those who have the highest deductions to their benefit payments.

We will review and trial initiatives to support mobility for social housing tenants who are under-occupying their homes - including our ‘home exchange’ events to promote and facilitate mutual exchanges - reducing the risk of tenants getting into arrears or their housing costs becoming unaffordable.

Ensuring effective and accurate information is available for people being discharged from hospital to prevent homelessness

Patients who are discharged from hospital as homeless without appropriate support and advice are at risk of continued health problems and in particular for those who rough sleep this is a factor in repeat admissions. The key to preventing vulnerable people from being discharged from hospital as homeless is through identification at

the point of admission. This involves robust information sharing and clear advertising of the Housing Advice Service.

We will create a discharge protocol with both Prospect Park Hospital and Royal Berkshire Hospital, focusing on mechanisms for hospital staff to notify the appropriate services at the point of the admission that a person is homeless, by detailing clear pathways for service access. We will monitor homeless discharges and review the resources required to coordinate these.

Meet the criteria for the Gold Standard for the Housing Advice Service

The Gold Standard has been set by the Government as a set of standards for a Housing Advice Service “to help stem future increases in homelessness and rough sleeping by encouraging local authorities to deliver comprehensive preventative services for all clients - not just the families and very vulnerable individuals who would otherwise be owed a statutory duty”¹⁹

We have pledged to work towards achieving the principles of this standard and will undertake a review of our Housing Advice Service to highlight any areas which require development and will implement service improvements as a result.

We will continue to focus on increasing the quality of the advice available from our Housing Advice Service, including by conducting formal case reviews.

Work in Partnership with Adult Social Care and other services to provide targeted advice for older people living in poor quality accommodation

As part of Reading Borough Council's response to the enhanced Advice and Information requirement detailed in the Care Act 2014, Adult Social Care has reviewed the information currently available to Older People. It is important that information about Housing Services is included and the Reading Services Guide²⁰, Reading Borough Council's directory of services, will be updated to ensure that this information is available and accurate.

In addition the assessment process for eligibility for Adult Social Care is changing and will include discussing with all clients what information has been shared with them and what other services they have been referred to. This discussion will be documented and additional training for Adult Social Care staff will be offered to ensure that this discussion includes advice and information that the client may require about their housing situation.

This will complement the existing process we have in place with partners and services within the Council that lead to referrals to housing services. A critical referral pathway runs from and to Reading's Winter Watch scheme. Winter Watch provides practical support and advice to vulnerable residents in Reading who need assistance to make sure they live in homes that are warm and fuel efficient and the support offers include:

¹⁹ <http://home.practitionersupport.org/content/>

²⁰ <http://servicesguide.reading.gov.uk/kb5/reading/directory/home.page>



- Home energy checks
- Draught-proofing
- Access to grants for insulation
- Provision of heaters and bedding
- Emergency payments

Winter Watch focuses on older and disabled residents, and due to the home visits that form part of the support officers often identify high risk situations and will continue to act as a conduit for Adult Social Care clients accessing housing services, as well as making referrals to Adult Social Care for support.

Officers within the Housing Service will also continue to be trained on the support available from Adult Social Care to ensure referrals are made for assessments and support for homeless adults with social care needs.

Homeless Strategy Delivery Plan

The accompanying Homelessness Strategy Delivery Plan assigns responsibility and timeframes for actions so that progress can be monitored. Key milestones in achieving the strategic priorities provide a framework to ensure that the Homelessness Strategy and the Delivery Plan are robust.

Progress on Reading Borough Council Homelessness Strategy delivery plan will be monitored quarterly by RBC Housing Management Team.

We will review the Homelessness Strategy and action plan annually so that it is responsive to emerging needs, this will be carried out by the Reading Homelessness Forum, once established, to ensure multiagency engagement and a partnership approach to its delivery.

Post review we will publish an updated Delivery Plan on our website so that stakeholders and residents can see progress and achievements.



Appendix One Existing multiagency meetings responsible for strategy or case management for people who may be homeless or at risk of homelessness

| Name of meeting | Services represented | Remit |
|---|---|--|
| Access Panel | <i>Housing Needs</i> Homeless Pathway providers; Community Rehabilitation Company | Access to general needs housing related accommodation-based and floating support services for single people |
| Young Persons Housing and Support Panel | <i>Children's Services</i> Children's Commissioning; Youth Offending Service; Housing providers; Housing Needs; Young Persons Drug Services (Source); Young Persons Employment and Training Service (Adviza) | Prevention of homelessness for under 18s and access into Young Persons supported accommodation |
| Move On Options Panel | <i>Housing Needs</i> Homeless Pathway providers | Move on from Homeless Pathway accommodation |
| Family Housing Support Panel | <i>Housing Needs</i> Children's Action Teams Floating support providers | Access to housing related floating support for families |
| Priority Treatment Group | Housing Needs DAAT Antisocial behaviour team Iris Street Outreach Team | Coordinated support to access services for individuals with multiple needs |
| Integrated Offender Management (IOM) | <i>Police/Probation</i> Housing Needs Iris RAHAB Youth Offending Service | Discussion and information sharing about individuals identified as prolific priority offenders |
| Multi-Agency Public Protection Arrangements (MAPPA) | <i>Police/Probation</i> Safeguarding Adults Children's Services Housing Needs Youth Offending Service JobCentre Plus | Discussion and information sharing about high risk offenders |
| Street Population Group | <i>Community Safety</i> Accommodation-based and floating support providers Street Outreach Team | Discussion, information sharing and target resources for those most prolifically involved in street-based antisocial |

| | | |
|--|---|--|
| | Iris Housing Needs Police | behaviour |
| Street Workers Action Group | <i>Community Safety</i> Street Outreach Team Iris Housing Needs RAHAB Alana House Police | Discussion, information sharing and target resources for sex workers |
| Multi-Agency Risk Assessment Committee (MARAC) | <i>Police/Probation</i> Safeguarding Adults Children's Services Housing Needs Berkshire Women's Aid | Discussion and information sharing about individuals identified as being at high risk of domestic violence |
| Team Around The Child | Children's Services Plus any services linked to the child or family | Action plan to best engage a child or family with highlighted problem areas |
| Risk Enablement Panel | <i>Adult Safeguarding</i> Adult Safeguarding Any services linked to the person | Safeguarding concerns with individuals with multiple high level needs |
| Adult Social Care Panel | <i>Personal Budget Support Team</i> Adult Social Care services Adult Social Care Commissioning Housing Needs | Accommodation options for those with eligible for Adult Social Care needs |
| Case Conferences - various | Any lead agency Any services linked to the child, family or adult | Action plan to best engage a child, family or individual with highlighted problem areas |
| Child Protection | <i>Children's Services</i> Any services linked to the child or family | Action plan to best engage a child or family with highlighted problem areas |
| Troubled Families | <i>Children's Services</i> Any services linked to the child or family | Action plan to best engage a child or family with highlighted problem areas |
| Safeguarding Core Groups | <i>Adult Safeguarding</i> Any agencies/services linked to the person | Safeguarding concerns with individuals who are identified as a vulnerable adult. |
| Care Plan Approach Meetings | <i>Community Mental Health Team</i> Community Mental Health Team | Agree and update Care Plans |

| | | |
|---------------------------|--|--|
| | Any services linked to the person | |
| Management Transfer Panel | Tenant Services Housing Needs Community Safety | Review referrals for management transfers within the Council's housing stock |
| Integrated Review Panel | DAAT Iris Housing Needs | Funding for residential drug and alcohol rehabilitation |

