

Overview and Scrutiny Committee

15 January 2019



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|----------------------------------|---|---------------------|----|
| Title | Housing Options Update | | |
| Purpose of the report | To note | | |
| Report Author | Deborah Ashman & Karen Sinclair | | |
| Cabinet Member | Councillor Mark Francis | Confidential | No |
| Corporate Priority | Housing | | |
| Recommendations | To note the successful implementation of the Homeless Reduction Act and progress being made for the White House Site. | | |
| Reason for Recommendation | Not applicable | | |

1. Key issues

- 1.1 Overview & Scrutiny have requested a written update on the following areas:
- (a) Homeless Reduction Act Update
 - (b) Choice Based Lettings Scheme (CBL) and what we are planning to do to promote choice now that the scheme is a Spelthorne only one.
 - (c) Rent Assure Scheme and an update on initiatives.
 - (d) White House Plans

2. Homeless Reduction Act (HRA) Update

- 2.1 At its meeting on 28 November 2017, Overview & Scrutiny Committee were presented with a report on the implications of the Act.
- 2.2 The Act came into effect on 3 April 2018. In preparation, 3 new members of staff were recruited (2 new posts and 1 new officer to replace someone who had left) and all were in position by March 2018.
- 2.3 An updated homeless module was developed by our IT provider Locata called HPA2. This was developed to be HRA compliant and included the ability to create Personal Housing Plans (PHP) online with a portal for clients to be able to log in and update their own plans. One of the issues from the trailblazer authorities who piloted the HRA was that their PHPs were paper documents which needed typing over and printing off each time there was a change. Just as significantly, the MHCLG introduced a new way for local authorities to report homelessness activity in their area called H-CLIC, and HPA2 enables us to provide statistical information to them online.
- 2.4 MHCLG have employed a number of advisers to assist Local Authorities implement the Act. Spelthorne has been assessed as well prepared. And the adviser made the following comment in her assessment. *"In addition to being impressed by the early work done in Spelthorne to be ready for the HRA, I am*

especially impressed by the culture and positivity of staff in embracing the changes (including the data collection which has been a challenge across the country). Thank you once again for the Hcllc submission.”

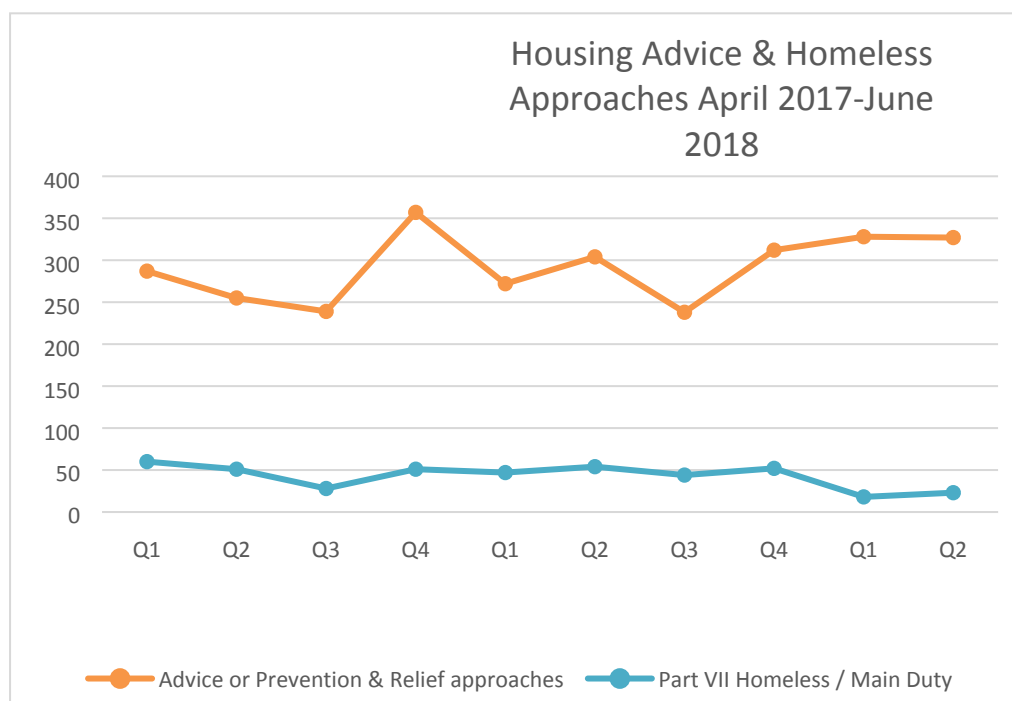
2.5 In terms of preparing staff and stakeholders there were two events held jointly with Runnymede BC to inform partners of the changes which attracted over 100 delegates. There was formal HRA training and Shelter provided training for new staff and refresher training for existing staff. Seperate briefings have been held with Community Mental Health, Probation, HMP Bronzefield, Adult Services and the Abraham Cowley Unit.

2.6 One of the principal changes introduced under the HRA was that everyone who is threatened with homelessness receives an assessment. Some Local Authorities predicted a doubling in workload, whilst others who were operating a “gatekeeping policy” would also have to assess higher numbers of applicants.

2.7 Spelthorne has always followed the law and have developed a comprehensive service for single people and childless couples through our work with the Rentstart charity. Based on previous approaches and an understanding of the causes of homelessness locally we did not predict a significant increase in the numbers of households approaching. The following chart demonstrates this in a graphic format.

2.8

| Case type | Q1 | Q2 | Q3 | Q4 | Q1 | Q2 | Q3 | Q4 | Q1 | Q2 |
|--|------------|------------|------------|------------|------------|------------|------------|------------|------------|------------|
| Advice or Prevention & Relief approaches | 287 | 255 | 239 | 357 | 272 | 304 | 238 | 312 | 328 | 327 |
| Part VII Homeless / Main Duty | 60 | 51 | 28 | 51 | 47 | 54 | 44 | 52 | 18 | 23 |
| Quarterly Total | 347 | 306 | 267 | 408 | 319 | 358 | 282 | 364 | 346 | 350 |



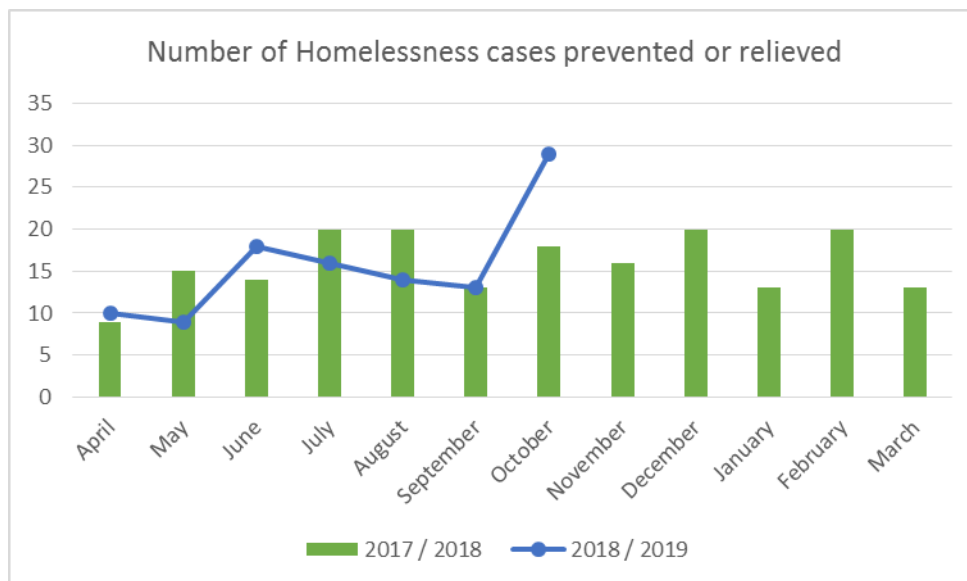
2.9 Q1 2018 is when the HRA started and although overall numbers of advice approaches remain constant the number of cases where homelessness was not prevented has fallen dramatically

- 2.10 When considering referrals to Rentstart, a similar pattern emerges that the numbers have stayed quite steady.

Referrals to Rentstart

| | 2017 | 2018 |
|----|------|------|
| Q1 | 45 | 54 |
| Q2 | 63 | 63 |

- 2.11 The intention of the HRA is for Local Authorities to have a statutory basis on homeless prevention and early intervention.



- 2.12 The above chart demonstrates that half way through the year homeless preventions are increasing.
- 2.13 Duty to Refer was intended to start in April with the rest of the Act. The Government delayed this until 1 October 2018. The explanatory information on who is affected is attached as Appendix1 in the format that was sent to affected partners.
- 2.14 The intention was to give a legal basis to early referral mechanisms for households primarily in institutions who were threatened with homelessness. Take up as been slow and so far only 4 referrals have been through Duty to Refer.
- 2.15 Our assessment on the impact of the Act has so far been proven to be accurate and the main effect on staff has been a significant increase in paperwork as there can now be up to 5 decision letters to write compared with 1 under the previous legislation.
- 2.16 Feedback from other Authorities has included a doubling in B&B numbers and significant increases in the number of approaches. Spelthorne has kept numbers in B&B steady and not experienced a significant increase in approaches.
- 2.17 This is believed to be a reflection of previous good practice and adoption of initiatives to assist in homeless prevention.

3. Choice Based Lettings

3.1 In the past Local Authorities would allocate social housing by assessing a household's needs and then make a direct allocation. Choice based lettings was intended to empower customers by advertising properties and letting the customer decide whether they wanted to make a bid for it or wait for another property to become available.

3.2 Spelthorne has now withdrawn from a common scheme with Elmbridge for the allocation of social housing and members were concerned that this might diminish choice for applicants.

3.3 Figures over the last 9 years show the previous numbers of households on the Spelthorne Housing Register who were housed in Elmbridge.

| | 2017 - | 2016 - | 2015 - | 2014 - | 2013 - | 2012 - | 2011 - | 2010 - | 2009 - | Total |
|----------------------------------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-------|
| | 2018 | 2017 | 2016 | 2015 | 2014 | 2013 | 2012 | 2011 | 2010 | |
| Number Housed in Elmbridge | 18 | 15 | 25 | 20 | 17 | 11 | 13 | 14 | 5 | 138 |

3.4 Typically this represents about 7% of the overall lettings in one year.

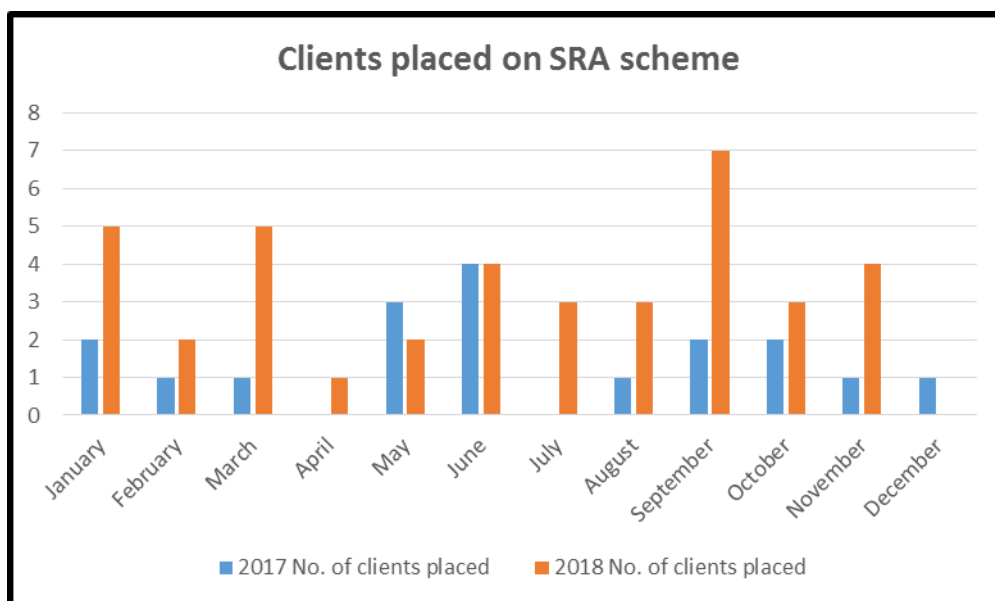
3.5 For existing social housing tenants the choices enabling them to move are:

- For under-occupying households who want a smaller property. An application to Spelthorne Housing Register where they will be awarded Band A.
- An application to Home Hunt. This is A2Dominion's transfer register and also used by other landlords to advertise hard to let properties anywhere in the country.
- Homeswapper enables tenants to transfer with another tenant. This is not limited to properties within Spelthorne and
- For households who need to move urgently they can apply for a management transfer. The rules are different between each social landlord and some may offer to move the person to another area where they have property.
- For households wanting sheltered accommodation there is often a higher supply than demand and potential host authorities waive their local connection criteria.
- For those looking to buy we publicise the Help to Buy scheme and home ownership fairs.
- We have been in negotiation with A2Dominion to vary the LSVT agreement to secure our nomination rights.

3.6 These are in addition to the benefits of a CBL scheme which allows customers to bid more than once and express choice in the part of the borough they want to live.

4. Rent Assure Scheme Initiatives

- 4.1 To strengthen our private rental market position we set up the rent assure scheme. Under the scheme we arrange a tenancy and guarantee that the landlord will receive a fair market rent for 2 years. The scheme has developed over the past year and the number of households assisted has increased.



- 4.2 A successful landlords' forum was held on 8 May 2018 with 39 landlords in attendance. During the forum, attendees were asked to provide feedback on what initiatives they would like the scheme to implement.
- 4.3 Landlords' favoured option was for the Council to provide a full management service which would include repairs and rent collection. This is not something we have the capacity to do at present but we are increasing the amount of time we put in to ensure tenancies are sustained. Amongst other feedback, we are considering the following:
- (a) Landlord Accreditation. Peter Littlewood from the ihowz landlord association who spoke at the forum provided a landlord accreditation training session for staff from Housing Options, Environmental Health and Rentstart. This enabled staff to see things from a landlord perspective and proved very useful. We are planning to offer this accreditation training as an incentive to encourage new landlords to join the scheme and upskill existing landlords.
 - (b) Landlord Insurance. We are also looking at the possibility of paying for the first year's premium on a landlord insurance scheme. On the rare occasions where there is a claim for damages that goes beyond fair

wear and tear the deposit is not sufficient to make good the defects. No decision has been made on this proposal yet.

- (c) The Government have invited bids for a private rented scheme (PRS) access fund which will enable Local Authorities to prevent homelessness and reduce numbers in temporary accommodation. The total fund is £20m and our bid is for £44,270. If successful, the money would be used on a 15 month project to provide extra tenancy sustainment for tenants in the Rent Assure Scheme, the ability to extend the scheme from 2 to 3 years in exceptional cases, and the ability to offer the scheme to certain single people and childless couples and not just families. The successes of the project will be used to consider a wider evaluation of the scheme, and more permanent roll-out of the project going forward.

5. White House Plans

- 5.1 The Council intends to build a single persons hostel on land it owns adjacent to the White House depot in Ashford. We have approached Homes England who are responsible for grant funding affordable housing development, and they are receptive to our plans.
- 5.2 The initial proposal is a three storey 23 room hostel with en-suite bathrooms and shared kitchens, and 7 self-contained 'move-on' studio flats on the top floor. Final numbers depend on the scheme design and if Homes England want us to change anything.
- 5.3 Members on the Spelthorne Joint Committee have been briefed and are very supportive, as are Spelthorne's Cabinet.
- 5.4 We are actively engaging with an experienced provider of hostel accommodation on the design of the building. Once the scheme design is frozen, and costings confirmed, an application will be made to Homes England for grant funding to contribute towards the capital costs of the project. At the same time, a planning application will be submitted.
- 5.5 Once grant funding and planning consent is secured, we will agree the Heads of Terms with the provider for a long term lease of the building.
- 5.6 We hope the building will be ready for occupation mid to late 2020.

Background papers:

Appendices: Duty to Refer

Appendix 1: Duty to Refer guidance

Dear colleagues

The Homelessness Reduction Act was implemented in April 2018. This imposed various legislative requirements on not only District and Borough Housing Departments, but also on certain named public authorities in England. These named public services are;

- Prisons
- Youth Offender Institutions
- Secure training centres
- Secure colleges
- Youth Offending teams
- Probation Services (including Community Rehabilitation Companies)
- Job Centre Plus
- Social Service Authorities
- Emergency Departments
- Urgent Treatment Centres
- Hospital in the function of providing inpatient care
- The Secretary of State for Defence in relation to members of the regular forces

These public services are now subject to the Duty To Refer. This means that if you are aware of a client who you consider may be homeless or threatened with homelessness within 56 days you have a legal duty to refer them to a district or borough housing department.

Before making the referral you must;

- Have consent for the referral from the individual
- Allow the individual to identify the area that they would like the referral to be made to (this can only be within England)
- Have consent from the individual that their contact details can be shared with the housing authority so that they can be contacted after the referral has been made.

Details regarding the duty to refer can be found on each of the Surrey Local Authorities websites in their Housing Section. Each Website will have a **referral link** for agencies on their homelessness pages. This link will then take you through to a **referral tool** by which you can input all the clients' details and send these securely to the local authority in question. The link is secure and therefore does not breach any GDPR regulations.

As mentioned earlier, **referrals can only be made with the clients express agreement.**

Although clients are able to express where they would like the referral to be made, they are generally best made to the area where the individual has a **local connection**. Details of local connection criteria are as follows;

- Where someone has lived for 6 months out of the last 12
- Where someone has lived for 3 years out of the last 5 years
- Where someone is employed
- Where someone has close family members residing (and they have done so for the last 5 years). This generally means parents, adult children or adult siblings.
- Other special reason

- Where they have no safe local connection anywhere
- **Care Leavers** – if a local connection is held with any individual district or borough then they will have a local connection with all districts and boroughs in that county. IN addition to this, if the young person has been living in that area for a continuous period of two years or more, some or all of which must be before their 16th birthday (this does not apply after they have reached 21)

This referral does not constitute a homeless application, however it will mean that the district or borough can engage with the individual, arrange a housing options assessment and look at what advice and possible assistance can be given to resolve their housing issues.

Across the Surrey authorities we are using two different software providers, however although the look of the referral form may differ, the information and process will remain the same. Half of the local authorities are using a software called ALERT – these are Mole Valley; Tandridge; Woking; Waverley; Guildford; Epsom. When you first click on the link you will be taken through to a portal which will allow your agency to register as a user of ALERT. You will then be able to not only submit referrals but also see when those referrals have been considered by the local authority you have sent them to. This will give you confidence that the referral is being actioned. The other software being used by some Surrey authorities is Locata. This is being used by Spelthorne; Elmbridge; Reigate and Banstead; Surrey Heath and Runnymede. The process will be similar to ALERT.

These processes do not undermine the protocols that we already have in place with many agencies such as hospital discharge protocols. Where extra information such as discharge plans and risk assessments are already required at the point of referral these will still be required. This is simply a process to help us all to work closer together in clients' interest whilst meeting these new legislative requirements.

Should you be unclear of have any questions about this email and the requirements on your organisation, please feel free to contact either myself, or the housing needs manager in your locality.