Dacorum Homelessness Strategy

2013-18

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Housing Strategy 2013-2018; Housing Allocations Policy; Strategic Tenancy Policy; Affordable Housing SPD; Core Strategy; HRA Business Plan; Housing Market and Needs Assessment 2012; Economic Development Strategy; Private Sector Housing Strategy; Private Sector Housing Assistance Policy; Information Management Strategy			

Contents

1. Introduction to the strategy

1.1 Preventing homelessness is a high priority for Dacorum Borough Council. Settled housing provides the foundation on which the residents of Dacorum can build their lives.

1.2 This Homelessness Strategy outlines how the Council is working with its partners to achieve part of the overall shared vision for the Housing Service:

> *We will provide good quality, affordable homes, help maintain tenancies and prevent homelessness – and be honest about improvements we still need to achieve.*

1.3 The last Homelessness Strategy covered the period 2008 - 2013. It set out a vision to increase homelessness prevention and reduce the use of temporary accommodation. Working closely with its partners the Council has been successful in delivering positive changes and improvements. There are now increasing challenges ahead and this strategy is being launched in a context of economic difficultly, significant changes to funding for the public and voluntary sectors, and significant changes to social policy and related legislation. There is a very high demand for housing locally and a lack of affordable housing accessible to households on low incomes.

1.4 The new Homelessness Strategy forms part of the Housing Service framework, containing the strategies and policies that take forward housing provision and services within the Borough. It builds on the Council's Corporate Plan and Housing Strategy adopted in 2013, specifically in relation to meeting housing needs and preventing homelessness. It is evidence based and has been developed in consultation and partnership with stakeholders.

This Homelessness Strategy has an important role to play in taking forward two of the strategic objectives from the Housing Strategy 2013-2018:

- *Improve prevention of homelessness and the range of temporary housing options; and*
- *Foster the private sector as a housing option.*

In the 2013/14 Housing Service Plan the Council committed to developing a strategy that will -

> *set long-term strategic objectives with a clear action plan for:*
> - *Preventing homelessness;*
> - *Improving temporary housing options; and*
> - *Focusing on suitable and well-managed resettlement into more secure accommodation.*

1.5   To drive forward change and improvements that will support the Council's objectives, this Homelessness Strategy sets out four key strategic objectives. The Council is confident that these are the right objectives, because:

- They have incorporated feedback from partners about the direction and vision needed to move the service forward; and
- They are based on a review of the service, which has brought together evidence on the service's performance over the life-span of the last strategy (provided in Section 3 "Homelessness Service Review"), identifying the areas of work needed to move the service forward.

Our key strategic objectives

The Council and its partners will:

- Make every contact count in the primary prevention of homelessness

- Secure suitable and affordable accommodation for people who are homeless or threatened with homelessness.

- Provide support to prevent repeat homelessness and improve outcomes for people who are homeless or threatened with homelessness.

- Tackle the root causes of homelessness through much earlier intervention and prevention through education.

1.6   In April this year, the Housing Minister announced a new Gold Standard - setting the bar for local homelessness services and containing Ten Local Challenges. The Council believes that the key objectives will drive forward the change necessary to meet this standard. This has been underpinned by signing up to the Gold Standard pledge – "to strive for continuous improvement".
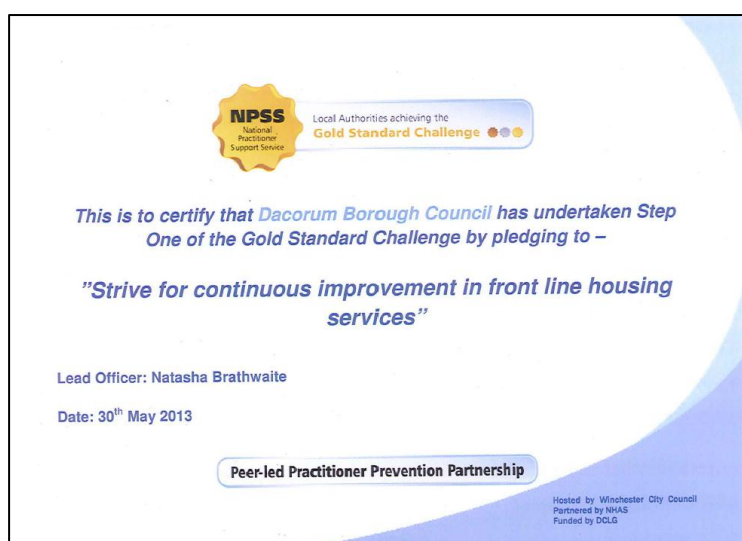
1.7 The Ten Local Challenges cover both priority and non-priority groups and this strategy sets out how the Council, working with its partners, will work to meet the needs of households across all these groups. The four key objectives push the service to meet the Ten Local Challenges, and this has been highlighted in Section 4 "The key strategic objectives".

The Ten Local Challenges are:

1. Adopt a corporate commitment to prevent homelessness which has buy in across all local authority services.

2. Actively work in partnership with voluntary sector and other local partners to address support, education, employment and training needs.

3. Offer a Housing Options prevention service, including written advice, to all clients.

4. Adopt a *No Second Night Out* model or an effective local alternative.

5. Have housing pathways agreed or in development with each key partner and client group that includes appropriate accommodation and support.

6. Develop a suitable private rented sector offer for all client groups, including advice and support to both clients and landlords.

7. Actively engage in preventing mortgage repossessions including through the Mortgage Rescue Scheme

8. Have a **homelessness strategy** which sets out a proactive approach to preventing homelessness and is reviewed annually so that it is responsive to emerging needs

9. Not to place any young person aged 16 or 17 in Bed and Breakfast accommodation

10. Not to place any families in Bed and Breakfast accommodation unless in an emergency and then for no longer than 6 weeks

1.8 This strategy meets the duty placed on housing authorities in the Housing Act 1996 (as amended by 2002 Homelessness Act) to:

- Carry out a review of homelessness in their areas;
- Formulate and publish a homelessness strategy based on this review;
- Consult other local or public authorities, or voluntary organisations before adopting or modifying the strategy; and
- Keep the strategy under review.

2.   The national picture

2.1   The financial year 2009/10 saw an increase in homelessness acceptances by local authorities of 10%, representing the first financial year increase since 2003/04. This trend has since continued and has triggered a number of government responses.

2.2   The Government's Housing Strategy, *Laying the foundations: a housing strategy for England* (November 2011) acknowledged the challenges posed by tackling homelessness:

> *Tackling homelessness is a key priority for the Government. We recognise that this will be a demanding task over the next few years, as the legacy of the recession continues to bite. We know that statutory homelessness acceptances are rising and there are signs that rough sleeping is increasing in key areas such as London. This makes action to grow the economy even more urgent.*

2.3   The Ministerial Working Group on Homelessness published *Making every contact count: A joint approach to preventing homelessness* in August 2012. This paper considers:
> *How services can be managed in a way that prevents all households, regardless of whether they are families, couples, or single people, from reaching a crisis point where they are faced with homelessness.*

2.4   In the first quarter of 2013, the main reasons for homelessness acceptances nationally were:
- Eviction by parents, relatives or friends (30%); and
- Loss of rented accommodation due to termination of an assured shorthold tenancy (23%).

Loss of rented accommodation due to termination of an assured shorthold tenancy has been increasing and was the cause of only 11% of homelessness acceptances in 2009, whereas the proportion of family evictions has gone done slightly from 2009 when it was the cause of 36%.

2.5   Alongside *Making every contact count: A joint approach to preventing homelessness* the Government published an *Evidence Review of the Costs of Homelessness* in which it estimated that the gross cost was between £24,000 and £30,000 per person, with a total annual gross cost of up to £1billion. This comprised benefit payments, health costs, and costs to the criminal justice system from crimes committed by the homeless. Most of the identified costs related to non-statutory homeless single rough sleepers and hostel dwellers but the costs of statutory homelessness incurred by local government were included.

2.6   The *Localism Act 2011* contained measures to enable local authorities to discharge their duty towards statutorily homeless households by offering a tenancy in the private rented sector. The *Homelessness (Suitability of Accommodation) (England) Order 2012* brought the measures into force on 9 November 2012 and statutory guidance on the Order has been published to which local authorities must have regard. The offer must be an Assured Shorthold Tenancy with a minimum fixed term of 12 months. Applicants will not have the discretion to decline the offer as a final discharge, although they will retain the right to request a review of suitability whether they accept the offer or not. The guidance describes situations in which private rented housing should be regarded as unsuitable.

2.7　The Council is aware of, and monitoring, out-of-area placements into the Borough by London local authorities using the new power to discharge the homelessness duty into the private rented sector. These placements could have an impact on local communities, and also reduce the private rented sector stock available to the Council and its partners for housing residents local to the Borough. Local authorities are required to inform the Council when making a placement.

3. The service

3.1 The Council's homelessness service is provided by staff across its Strategic Housing Service: homelessness case work, prevention and advice, private rented sector access, temporary accommodation provision, allocations and re-housing.

Figure 1: Strategic Housing staff structure in June 2013
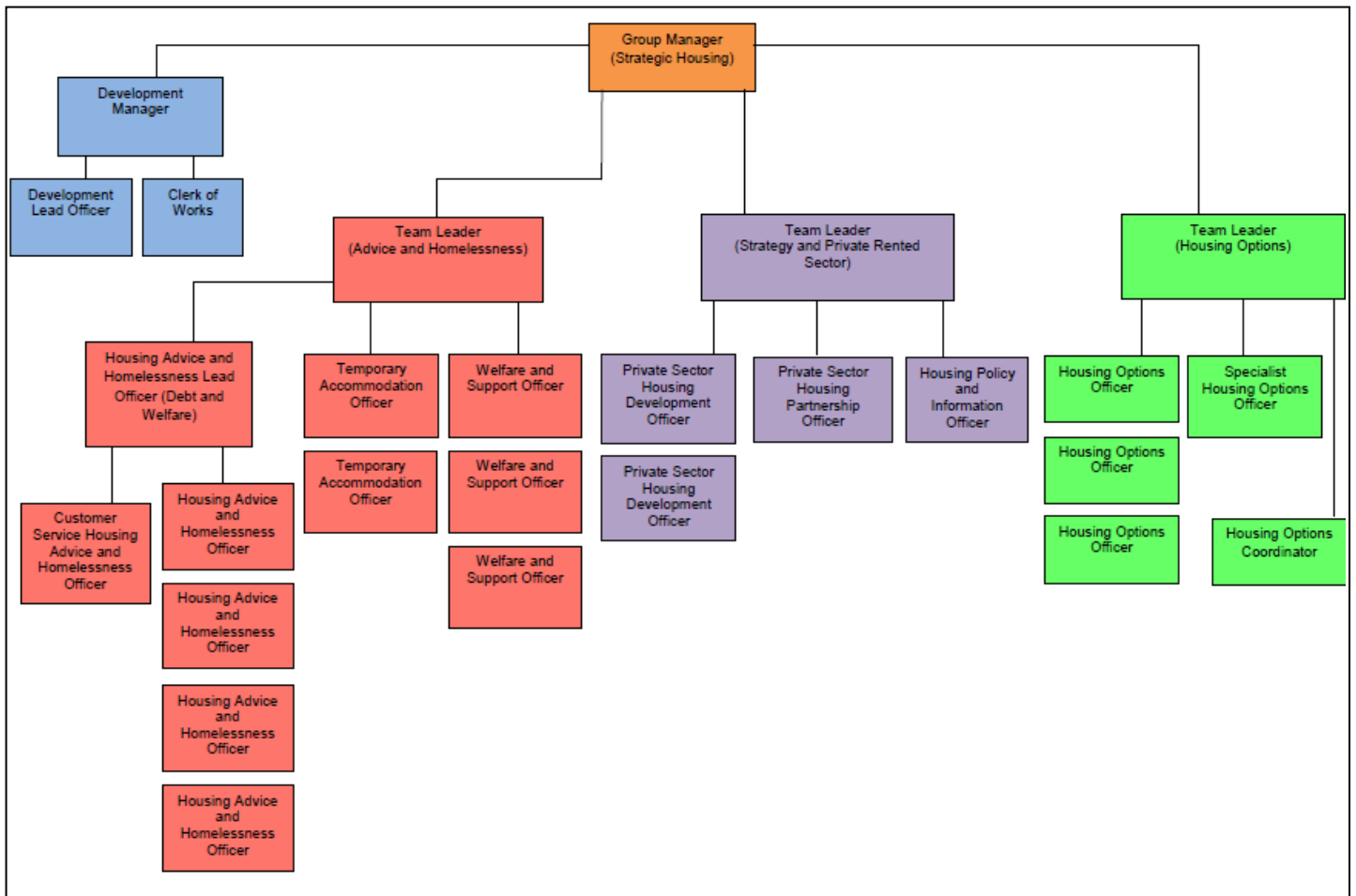
3.2   Partners involved in the homelessness service include:

Statutory Services	
Hertfordshire County Council	Herts Help
	Herts Health Action with the Homeless (HHAH)
	Thriving Families
St. Albans City and District Council	Homelessness Prevention Liaison Partner meetings
Homeless Link	Direction and resources
MAPPA (Multi-Agency Public Protection Arrangements)	Panel
MARAC (Multi-Agency Risk Assessment Consultation)	Panel
LRMP (Local Risk Management Panel)	Panel
Joint Housing Protocol signatories	Information sharing
Housing Associations	
Aldwyck Housing Group	Young Person's Service, includes: Swan Foyer
Hightown Praetorian and Churches Housing Association	Young Person's Service: George Street
	Open Door Homelessness Service
	Mother and Baby Unit
	Women's refuge
	Mental Health Supported Housing
Charitable Partners	
DENS	DENS Night Shelter
	DENS Day Centre
	DENS Rent Aid
	Dacorum Food Bank

Citizens Advice Bureau	
Christians Against Poverty	Debt counselling
Crime reduction Initiative (previously Turning Point)	Support packages for individuals developed at housing link branch
Druglink	Housing and social support for drug and alcohol users
Herts Supporting people	Private rental sector schemes
Herts Young Homeless	Mediation and prevention (especially in cases of drug and alcohol misuse)
	Floating support
	Crash pad
	'Home truths' education programme
Other	
Independent Domestic Violence advisor	Advocacy

3.3 Homelessness has been rising over the last five years, which has had a serious impact on the number of households in Temporary Accommodation in Dacorum (see Figures 2 and 3 below).

Figure 2: A graph to show the increase in homelessness acceptances in Dacorum by quarter

Households accepted as homeless in Dacorum
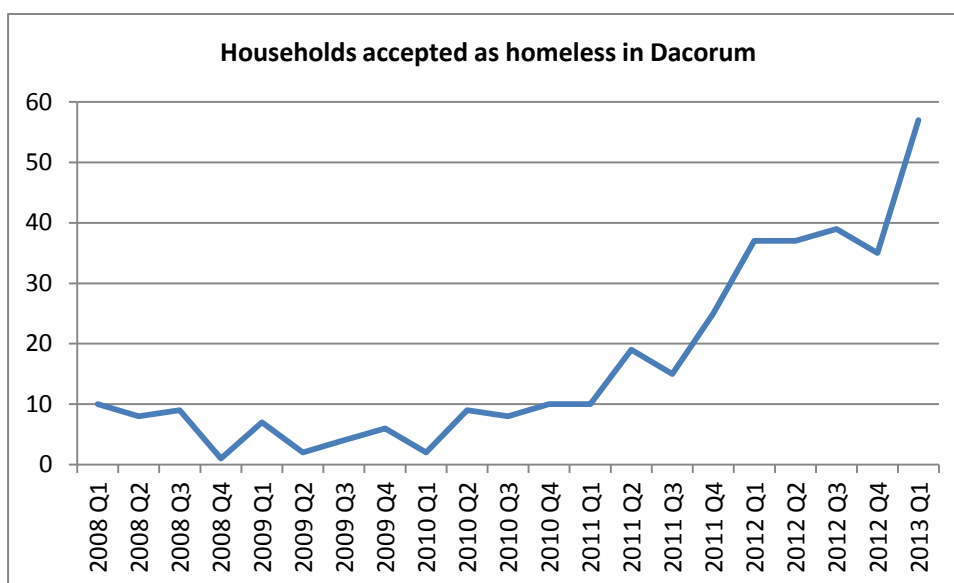
Figure 3: A graph to show the increase of households in Temporary Accommodation in Dacorum by quarter
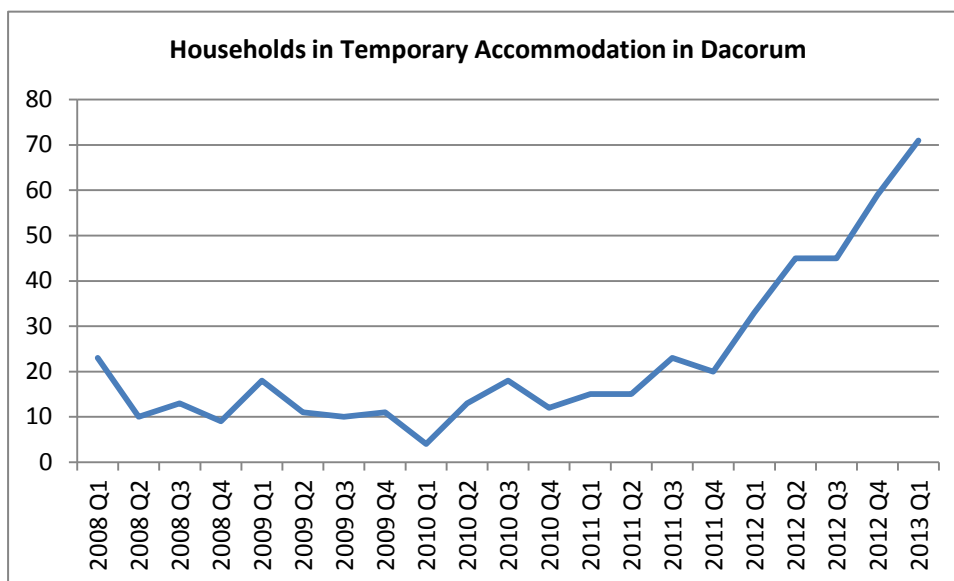
3.4 The Council's temporary accommodation stock currently consists of 17 self-contained flats, plus a further eight bedrooms with shared bathroom and kitchen facilities that were added to the stock in 2012 in response to demand. To meet the continued increase in demand the Council has had to make use of Council-owned empty properties together with Bed and Breakfast accommodation in emergency cases only. There were 67 households placed in all forms of temporary accommodation over the three months January to March 2013. Over the last year homelessness applications and acceptances, have remained consistently high in each quarter (see Figure 4 below). Although placements into bed and breakfast have been necessary, the Council will not place any household into bed and breakfast for more than six weeks, or use this accommodation for 16 or 17 year olds.

Figure 4: Quarterly homeless figures April 2012 – March 2013

Quarter	Number of new homeless applications received	Number of homeless acceptances	Number of households placed in Bed and Breakfast
April - June 2012	64	42	41
July - September 2012	72	47	53
October - December 2012	50	35	21
January - March 2013	57	44	32
Total	243	168	147

3.5 The Council's charitable partner DENS experienced a 25% increase in the number of individuals using their services in 2012/2013.

3.6 Breakdowns of the applicants accepted for homelessness provide a further insight into the local picture (see Figures 4 – 8 below). The main reason for homelessness

acceptances in 2012/13 was loss of rented accommodation due to termination of an assured shorthold tenancy (35%). The main priority need reason was dependent children (76%) and the main household type was a lone parent household (47%). 18% of homelessness acceptances were lone parent households losing private rented accommodation.

Figure 4: Breakdown of homelessness acceptances by reason for homelessness

Reason for homelessness	Number of acceptances
Loss of rented accommodation	
Loss of rented or tied accommodation: Termination of assured shorthold tenancy	59
Loss of rented or tied accommodation: Reasons other than termination of assured shorthold tenancy	7
Family or friends no longer able to accommodate	
Parents no longer willing or able to accommodate	35
Other relatives or friends no longer willing or able to accommodate	11
Relationship breakdown	
Non-violent breakdown of relationship with partner	11
Violence: Violent breakdown of relationship involving partner	8
Violence: Violent breakdown of relationship involving associated persons	4
Rent arrears	
Rent arrears on: Private sector dwellings	5
Rent arrears on: Local authority or other public sector dwellings	1
Mortgage arrears (repossession or other loss of home)	4
Other violence or harassment	
Violence: Other forms of violence	1
Harassment, threats or intimidation: Other forms of harassment	5
Other	
Left hospital	1
Left HM-Forces	1
Other reason (e.g. homeless in emergency, sleeping rough or in hostel, returned from abroad)	16

Figure 5: Breakdown of homelessness acceptances by Priority Need reason

Priority Need reason	Number of acceptances
Applicant whose household includes dependent children	128
Applicant who is, or whose household includes, a pregnant woman and there are no other dependent children	9
Applicant aged 16/17 years old	2
Applicant formerly in care, and aged 18 to 20 years old	1
Vulnerable due to old age	1
Vulnerable due physical disability	12
Vulnerable due to mental illness or handicap	10
Other	1
Vulnerable due to fleeing home because of domestic violence / threat of violence	5

Figure 6: Breakdown of homelessness acceptances by household type

Household type	Number of acceptances
Couple with dependent children or member pregnant	58
Lone parent household with dependent children or member pregnant	80
One person households	24
All other household types	7

Figure 7: Breakdown of homelessness acceptances by number of dependents
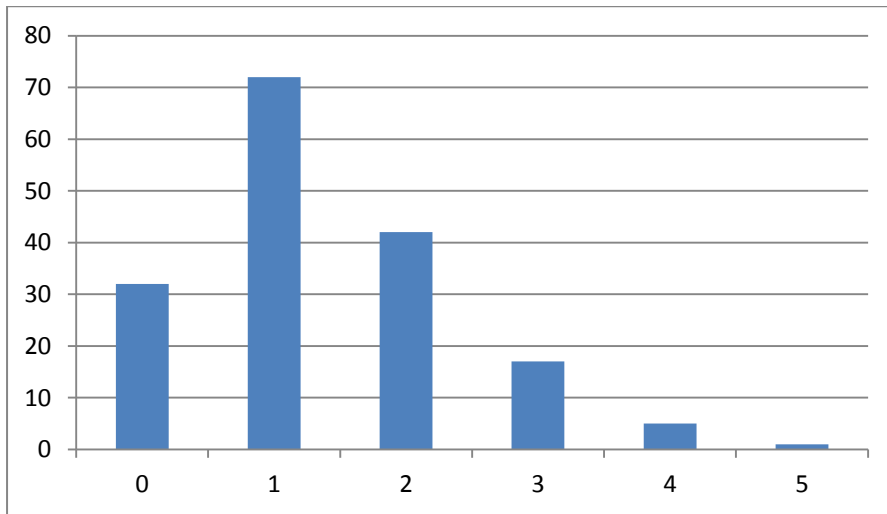
Figure 8: Breakdown of homelessness acceptances by age
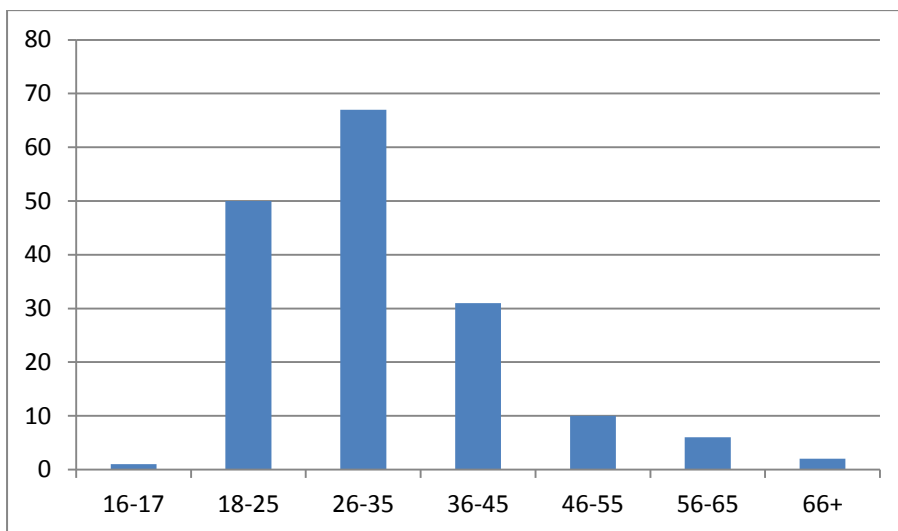
3.7 The Council's housing register has seen the number of active applications increase rapidly and steadily over the last five years. In June 2013 the housing register had 5802 home-seekers, 1599 transfer applicants, and 77 homeless applicants.

3.8 The level of housing need in the Borough is very high, and the increasing demand cannot be met by allocations through the housing register. In the first quarter of 2013 the number of properties advertised through the Council's choice based letting system was 102 and the number of bids made for those properties was 10,048 (an applicant can make three bids per weekly bidding cycle).

3.9 In April 2013 the Council approved a new Housing Allocations Policy, to be implemented in autumn 2013 once necessary computer system changes are in place. This policy aims to assist the Council in managing its housing register by introducing a deferred register for those applicants who do not meet a number of criteria, including tests of local connection and housing need.

3.10 There were 599 allocations made in 2012/13, of which 172 were to sheltered housing accommodation and 128 were to housing association properties. Of the housing association allocations 45 were into new build developments.

3.11 The Council has a social rented stock of about 10,500, and since the Housing Revenue Account self-financing, it has commenced its own new build programme for 71 new properties by March 2015, with a commitment to build 200 further properties in further development phases. In 2012/13 63 units were sold through the Right to Buy, although the receipts from Right to Buy are ring-fenced for new build Council homes. Funds from receipts have to be spent within three years of sale and are in addition to budgets committed to the existing new-build programme.

3.12 The average private rent in Dacorum has gone up from £886 per month in 2011 to £1,003 in the first quarter of 2013. A high proportion of evictions have been to lone parent households, often on low incomes and reliant at least partially on benefits for payment of rent. Local Housing Allowance (LHA) rates restrict the amount a household can claim for rent and this has discouraged many landlords from continuing tenancies. This presents a real challenge to the Council to work with the private rented sector and develop the skills to mediate with landlords to prevent unnecessary evictions.

4.   Homelessness service review

4.1   <u>Homelessness service review executive summary</u>

Statistics from the service over the last few years give a picture of a service under increasing pressure and demands (see Section 3 "The service"). Homelessness has increased locally and is remaining consistently high with no evidence that demand is about to start to decline. The service therefore needs to adapt and drive forward - to be successful in this it is necessary to have a complete picture of the current service, and understand how to manage change that can achieve the Council's vision.

The sources used in this review provide the following:

- Action plan review and continued strategic direction from the Homelessness Strategy 2008-2013;
- A review of the actions taken in response to risk identified by the Peer Review in May 2012 carried out by the Council's then Specialist Advisor;
- The recommendations requiring planned implementation from the Peer Review;
- A review of the actions taken in response to the recommendations from the Internal Audit carried out in February 2013 by Deloitte; and
- Recommendations from the service risk report carried out in May 2013 by an internal Corporate Graduate.

The review has identified a number of key areas for investment and improvement:

- **Internal processes**
  - ➢ Structured training programme for staff
  - ➢ Internal IT systems
  - ➢ The relationship with the Customer Service Unit and referral processes between other internal teams

- **Prevention**
  - ➢ An enhanced prevention service ensuring that all customers can receive housing options advice before they are homeless or are threatened with homelessness
  - ➢ Communicate realistic expectations to households unlikely to be re-housed through the housing register and provide advice on alternative housing options
  - ➢ Increase mediation in order to support applicants to remain in their current accommodation where possible
  - ➢ Improve the housing options advice and information available online, including an online housing options self-assessment tool
  - ➢ Early intervention programmes in schools, education settings and community groups

- **Suitable emergency accommodation**
  - ➢ Increase temporary accommodation options
  - ➢ Improve planned maintenance of temporary accommodation

- **Tenancy sustainability and improving outcomes**
  - ➢ Pre-tenancy training
  - ➢ Welfare and support provision
  - ➢ Appropriate move-on pathways
  - ➢ Training and work programmes

The key areas for investment and improvement have been corroborated by feedback from partners, which reflected the evidence in this review.

The four key strategic objectives (see Section 4 "The key strategic objectives") set the direction in which this strategy needs to drive the service forward. The Council is confident these are the right objectives because they have been developed from the key areas for investment and improvement identified from the evidence in this Homelessness Service Review.

4.2 The Homelessness Strategy 2008 – 2013 Action Plan

The 2008-2013 Homelessness Strategy committed to 10 objectives and 67 actions.

Objective	Actions
Early intervention and prevention of homelessness	12
Improve accessibility to the Private Sector	6
Sustainable tenancies	7
Making a difference to ex-offenders	5
Making a difference to people affected by domestic violence	7
Making a difference to people affected by mental health or drug and alcohol	5
Making a difference to young people	5
Making a difference to gain work or lifelong learning	6
Making a difference for healthier options	7
Making a difference by performance and continuous improvement	7

These objectives and actions have helped to drive the service forward. Some key service successes from the 2008-2013 Action Plan include:

Internal processes and staff resources
Housing Panel to coordinate actions between departments.
Specialist officer to coordinate supported housing allocations (in particular allocations to sheltered housing).
Mortgage rescue training for the Advice and Homelessness team.
Housing Benefit liaison meetings set up.
Good communication with the Council's landlord and anti-social behaviour departments, as well as local housing associations, to get early notification of evictions.
Support Plans for tenants in temporary accommodation have been reviewed and the Outreach Star model will be adopted in 2013.
Keeping children in their current school has been maintained as a priority when arranging move-on or re-housing.

Partnerships
Housing advice surgeries with the Crime Reduction Initiative.
Housing advice surgeries at HM Prison The Mount.
Health Visitors attend Temporary Accommodation.
Households are assisted to register with doctors, health visitors and children's services.
Successful working arrangements with the local MARAC panel and agencies working with victims and perpetrators of domestic abuse, including a target hardening scheme operated by the Council's landlord department.
Regular multi-agency meeting with local mental health services.
Multi-agency work with Herts Young Homeless liaison group.
Widened the choice of debt advice (Citizens Advice Bureau, Christians Against Poverty, in-house).
Welfare and Support Officers have links with Job Centre Plus to support those in temporary accommodation trying to get back into work.
Successful working arrangements with local Supporting People team.
Pilot project with Drug Link to develop move-on options in the private rented sector for single non-priority homeless households.
Sustainment of a regular Homeless Forum.
Dacorum Card used to give households discounts in certain local stores.
Work with toddler groups and successful sessions run at The Chilterns temporary accommodation.
New homeless hostel planned for 2015 as part of the Council's new build programme with services to be provided by local partners.

Other on-going work from the 2008-2013 Action Plan that will now feed into this strategy for 2013-18 includes:

Increasing work on tenancy sustainability and introduce pre-tenancy training.
Developing early intervention programmes in schools, education settings and community groups.
Developing training and work programmes.
Developing move-on accommodation options for different groups.
Reviewing the pathway and options for ex-offenders to prevent repeat homelessness.
Developing and expanding the Council's private rented sector access scheme.
Developing a skills and training programme for staff.

4.3   Peer Review (CLG Specialist Advisor, May 2012)

The Peer Review in May 2012 identified some areas for action which resulted in changes to the service soon after the time of review, and which have now had time to embed.

The actions taken in response to the feedback included:

- The recruitment of a temporary member of staff trained in homeless prevention and advice to occupy a dedicated desk in the customer service unit and be available to carry out interviews;
- The introduction of an afternoon duty-cover rota for the back office to respond to urgent cases where there is a risk of homelessness that night; and
- The updating of leaflets with current service information and providing copies in the customer service area.

These changes have been felt by staff to be successful in the following ways:

- Reducing risk to the service;
- Up-skilling customer service staff;
- Earlier prevention; and
- Officers have more time to focus on casework.

After a recent tender process the customer service unit will be managed by the private provider Northgate from Autumn 2013. In the long-term the successes so far delivered by the temporary staff member in the customer service unit will be achieved by the customer service representatives and this strategy will set out the vision for that service.

This strategy will also provide the framework for the planned implementation of further recommendations from the Peer Review:

Staff training
Introduction of a structured staff training programme with commitment to support staff to attend by ensuring cover of the essential frontline service.
Prevention
Focus prevention work on supporting applicants to remain in their current accommodation where possible, increasing mediation with families and private landlords to prevent evictions.
Develop an enhanced prevention service ensuring that all customers are given the opportunity to seek assistance before they are homeless or are threatened with homelessness within 28 days.
Conduct more preventative home visits.
Digital advice and information
Improve the housing options advice and information available on the website.
Introduce an online housing options self-assessment tool.

Move-on housing
Develop move-on pathways between different forms of supported housing.
Improving outcomes
A joint 'panel' to plan coordinated responses to deal with customers requiring joined-up services.
Temporary Accommodation
Improve planned maintenance of Council temporary accommodation.

4.4 Internal Audit (Deloitte, February 2013)

Three process recommendations came out of the internal audit in February 2013, which in summary were the following:

- Introduce a process to ensure that essential documentation relating to a homelessness application is scanned to the relevant system case file;
- Ensure decision letters are always saved to the system case file; and
- Improve information sharing with the Housing Benefit department, including the distribution of minutes from liaison meetings.

Since the audit the department has taken the following action:

- An existing backlog of scanning has been cleared by making use of both administrative assistance provided centrally and an apprentice on placement in the department until the end of August 2013;
- More channels of communication with the Housing Benefit team have been set up at the officer level; and
- New template decision letters have been entered into 'Abritas', the Council's IT system for managing homeless case files, which can be produced and saved automatically by the system.

The long-term implementation of these actions will now need to be monitored and incorporated into the action plan for this strategy.

4.5 Internal service report (May 2013)

The service report was based on the findings of 25 case studies selected to be representative of the range of homeless cases presenting to the Council over the three months January to March 2013. For each case, experiences were journey-mapped to investigate their interaction with the service. The aim of the risk assessment was to identify any 'holes in the net', and especially to identify where households could end up cumulatively vulnerable by missing out on more than one layer of assistance and support.

This strategy will provide the framework to make long-term plans that incorporate the recommendations from this report:

Temporary accommodation
Increase temporary accommodation options to minimise occasions when households may have to go into accommodation that is not completely appropriate.
Prevention
Enable officers to be able to provide early advice interviews.
Ensure prevention work can target cases when customers arrive after being issued a section 21 notice, to check the validity of the section 21 and to establish if there is any way of negotiating with the landlord.
Referral routes
Review routes in the service and referral processes to prevent families applying directly to the housing register without presenting as homeless at the CSU.
Review referral to the welfare and support service to allow this service to be accessed by those cases supported through mediation to stay in their current accommodation before re-housing.
Ex-offenders
Review the pathway for ex-offenders once they have to leave their temporary licensed accommodation provided by the probation service.
Cases of housing need where homelessness is not an immediate threat
Review the housing options advice being given, so that households are not left after completing a housing register application, despite the fact that it is clear that they do not have enough points to get a home by bidding through the choice based lettings system Moving with Dacorum.
Ensure that when households do not have clear re-housing options, they are given enough information to take away with them so they can make informed decisions later once they are prepared to make those decisions, but may no longer be in contact with the Council.

5. The objectives

KEY OBJECTIVE 1

To make every contact count in the primary prevention of homelessness

Gold Standard Local Challenges related to this Key Objective:

Adopt a corporate commitment to prevent homelessness which has buy in across all local authority services

Offer a Housing Options prevention service, including written advice, to all clients

Actively engage in preventing mortgage repossessions including through the Mortgage Rescue Scheme

Key areas for investment and improvement identified in the Homelessness Service Review related to this this Key Objective:

- Prevention
  - ➢ An enhanced prevention service ensuring that all customers can receive housing options advice before they are homeless or are threatened with homelessness
  - ➢ Communicate realistic expectations to households unlikely to be re-housed through the housing register and provide advice on alternative housing options
  - ➢ Increase mediation in order to support applicants to remain in their current accommodation where possible
  - ➢ Improve the housing options advice and information available online, including an online housing options self-assessment tool

- Internal processes
  - ➢ Structured training programme for staff
  - ➢ Internal IT systems
  - ➢ The relationship with the Customer Service Unit and referral processes between internal teams

To meet Key Objective 1 this strategy commits to:

1)   An internal review of staff roles within the Strategic Housing Team

There is a high cost to local authorities from households reaching crisis and being accepted as homeless. One of the impacts of rising caseloads is that prevention work becomes less likely to take place.

Responding to crisis cases is very time intensive for staff and caseloads do not have to rise by much before:

- Delays occur in response times resulting in missed opportunities for prevention;
- Juggling cases means that officers cannot dedicate the necessary time to each case to minimise or prevent crisis; and
- Other cases presenting as less urgent, and with more time to carry out prevention work, are left because there is not time for these to be prioritised.

Once crisis management takes up the majority of time for officers it becomes very difficult for individual staff under pressure to implement new ways of working that can turn the focus back onto prevention. To do this all staff need to be involved, working together with a shared understanding of priorities, to redress the balance between crisis work and prevention.

It is not just crisis casework which can result in teams focusing on workloads that do not help households to meet their housing need at a point when crisis can be prevented. Due to rising housing need, increasing numbers of applicants have been joining the housing register, although most of these households having little or no chance of being housed this way due to the very limited amount of available stock. However, each of these applications takes time to process, and contact with households often then focuses on the details of an application rather than discussion and advice on housing options. Instead, prevention housing interviews could be providing people in housing need with practical help to sustain a tenancy such as budgeting skills, result in referrals or signposting for support needs, and allow people to make informed decisions about their housing situation.

As part of the work that the Council has undergone in the development of this strategy, the Strategic Housing team has started a process of reviewing the roles and job descriptions of staff across service areas including: Advice and Homelessness, Welfare and Support, Temporary Accommodation, Housing Options, and Private Sector Housing.

The aims, in line with this objective, are to:

- Introduce the capacity for staff across the service to carry out prevention interviews, including a structured staff training programme;

- Identify early those households in housing need who may be suitable for housing in the private rented sector to the support tenant-property matching process;

- Reduce officer time spent processing housing register applications for households with an unrealistic chance of being rehoused in a Council or Housing Association property;

- Provide a structure within which case officers have the opportunity to carry out prevention while managing crisis work;

- Develop the skills to mediate with private sector landlords to prevent unnecessary evictions while maintaining mediation with households being evicted from family or friends; and

- Review how staff store information on IT systems to maximise benefits from:
  - paperless casework, and
  - secure information sharing.

To achieve Key Objective 1 this internal review will be completed with staff commitment across the service to a new way of working.

2) A front of house review

The Council has entered into a new contract to move the management of its Customer Service Unit to the private company Northgate from autumn 2013. This has provided an opportunity to:

- Review the service level agreement;

- Provide written scripts with accurate housing advice that can prompt decision letters, signposting, leaflets, and so on; and

- Set up an auditing process that will allow the Strategic Housing to monitor the service being provided in a way that has not been possible before now.

In 2014 staff currently located in the Council's Civic Centre will be decanted to an alternative location during redevelopment of the site. Strategic Housing needs to manage the impact of this on the front of house service and successfully communicate to residents what they need to know about interim arrangements.

To achieve Key Objective 1 both the handover to Northgate, and the Civic Centre decant, will be project managed by the department to ensure that the objective of prevention by making every contact count can be met.

3) Online housing options advice and information

The number of different ways someone can access housing options advice, the more likely they will be to engage with the information being provided. Online resources present new opportunities for communicating with residents and people in housing need, and the challenge to local authorities is to make the most of these channels to support their work.

The Strategic Housing service has started a review of its housing webpages, with a member of staff taking on responsibility for overseeing this project. This review aims to redesign the webpages to make information more accessible and to better meet the

needs of the intended audiences. The first new webpages are planned for autumn 2013 in line with a communication strategy for implementing service and policy changes.

To really make every contact count, then the service needs to make sure that every time a resident goes online to search for advice and information about housing options they can access:

- The opportunity to use a self-assessment tool;
- Advice and information pages with e-leaflets, all in plain English;
- Links to webpages hosted and
- Social media and online forum opportunities to ask questions and receive quick responses.

To achieve Key Objective 1 this will be a priority for the service, as increasing numbers of people now look to online resources in preference to phone calls or arranging face-to-face appointments.

4) A directory of services

A wide range of providers have services operating in the Borough, providing a service to a range of customers which play a key part in the prevention of crisis situations. These services regularly change, whether that is an expansion, re-branding, amalgamation or other change, and there is need for that information to be shared among providers working with similar customer groups, in order to:

- Provide officers with an approved resource of up-to-date service information that can be referred to during prevention interviews with residents in housing need; and

- Make sure that signposting and referral routes into services are known and followed as required.

To achieve Key Objective 1 successful referrals to housing and support agencies as part of prevention work will be essential. The Council and its partners need to be able to make the most of the services available to assist residents and help them manage their housing need.

The action plan

Key objective	Action	Team Resources	Financial Resources	Timeframes	Officer responsible
KO1	Service review of all staff roles within the Strategic Housing service	Within strategic housing team	Within current budgets	To be completed by Dec 2013	Julia Hedger
KO1	Set up of a structured staff training programme including training available through the Gold Standard	All relevant staff - attendance to be monitored by Team Leaders.	Within current training budget	To be in place by Dec 2013	Natasha Brathwaite
KO1	Set up a staff working group to monitor use of IT systems and assess whether full benefits are being achieved	Strategic Housing Team Leaders	No budget implications initially – will be dependent on recommendations whether budget impact next year	To be set up in Sept 2013 and to report back in March 2014 to SH Group Manager	Isabel Connolly
KO1	Develop scripts for the new CSU contract	Strategic Housing: all teams	No budget impact	To be completed by Sept 2013	Julia Hedger
KO1	Set up a framework for staff across Strategic Housing to audit the CSU service level agreement	Strategic Housing: Team Leaders	No budget impact	Audits to be carried out quarterly as per CSU SLA	Julia Hedger
KO1	Plan communications material on the front-of-office services and the measures that will be in place during the decant from the Civic Centre	Strategic Housing Team Leaders and Communications	Within current budgets	To be completed by March 2014	Isabel Connolly
KO1	Set up an online housing options self-assessment tool	Strategy and Policy Team	Computer system already purchased so no further impact on budget	To be set up by Oct 2013 and usage monitored quarterly via Corvu	Isabel Connolly

KO1	Develop and update the Council's webpages relating to the housing service	Strategy and Policy Team	No budget impact	To be set up by Oct 2013 and usage monitored quarterly via Corvu	Isabel Connolly
KO1	Set up online social media forums to provide quick responses to queries	Strategy and Policy Team	No budget impact	To be set up by Jan 2014 and usage monitored quarterly via Corvu	Isabel Connolly
KO1	Provide internal staff and partners with a comprehensive directory of services	Strategy and Policy Team	Within current budgets	To be in place by Oct 2013 and updated quarterly through the Homeless Forum	Isabel Connolly

KEY OBJECTIVE 2

To secure suitable and affordable accommodation for people who are homeless or threatened with homelessness

Gold Standard Local Challenges related to this Key Objective:

Have housing pathways agreed or in development with each key partner and client group that includes appropriate accommodation and support

Develop a suitable private rented sector offer for all client groups, including advice and support to both clients and landlords

Not place any young person aged 16 or 17 in Bed and Breakfast accommodation

Not place any families in Bed and Breakfast accommodation unless in an emergency and then for no longer than 6 weeks

Key areas for investment and improvement identified in the Homelessness Service Review related to this this Key Objective:

- Suitable emergency accommodation
  - ➢ Increase temporary accommodation options

- Tenancy sustainability and improving outcomes
  - ➢ Appropriate move-on pathways

To meet Key Objective 2 this strategy commits to:

1)   Increasing Temporary Accommodation options

The Council's temporary accommodation has not been able to meet the demand from the recent rise in homelessness acceptances. For this reason the Council has, in some situations, been forced to make use of bed and breakfast accommodation. This has very negative consequences because:

- This type of accommodation is very unsuitable, especially for families;

- It is recommended by the CLG not to place any household in bed and breakfast accommodation for more than six weeks;

- It is recommended by the CLG not to house any 16 or 17 year old in bed and breakfast;

- Costs to the Council are very high; and

- It becomes very difficult to deliver appropriate welfare and support to these households.

Due to the high demand on the Council's temporary accommodation, homeless households have had to be placed in Council owned properties. Bed and breakfast accommodation has also had to be used in emergencies, though households are not placed for longer than six weeks, and it is not used for 16-17 year olds.

The need to do this in order to respond to emergencies then prevents these voids being used straight away for households on the housing register. Partners have also reported a very high demand and long waiting lists for young persons' accommodation, and difficulties for individuals trying to access night shelter facilities.

The Council needs to be able to provide more temporary housing options in order to:

- Provide suitable temporary housing for homeless households;

- Reduce the use of Council owned stock so that these properties can be used for settled re-housing; and

- Reduce the use of bed and breakfast.

Since September 2012 the Council has leased five maisonettes from its Commercial Assets and Property Development department for temporary accommodation. The Council has also been working on a new-build development project for the construction of a new 41 bed homeless hostel, to be managed by a specialist provider of services for the homeless and due for completion in March 2015.

To achieve Key Objective 2 the Council will ensure that plans to lease, acquire and build new temporary accommodation are managed and completed to timescale. The Council will also continue to look for other temporary accommodation possibilities, considering the impact of location and property type on the ability to provide support, welfare and prevention opportunities. The aim is for a total of 100 temporary accommodation units to be in use by the end of the lifecycle of this strategy.

2) Developing all move-on pathways

For households in specialist forms of temporary accommodation with support, the length of stay will depend on the support needs of each individual or household. The Council is able to provide a limited number of allocations into council or housing association properties as a move-on pathway for households in supported accommodation once they are ready for independent living. The Council will consider move-on requests on behalf of an individual from the support provider or agency they have been working with during their placement. Such requests will be reviewed in consultation with the relevant parties in order to ensure the person is ready to move on into general needs housing and can be given reasonable preference in line with the Housing Allocations Policy.

Move-on allocations through the Council's Housing Allocations Policy are limited and therefore work alongside other move-on pathways. The private rented sector has become increasingly relied upon to offer households suitable accommodation. Private rented sector access schemes are being operated by both agencies working with single person households and the Council for the re-housing of households with dependents.

The demand for move-on allocations into council or housing association properties in the Borough comes from two main groups; households from the local mother and baby unit, and care leavers. The Council will work closely with partners to ensure that move-on accommodation is provided in a planned and timely way and that appropriate support is in place to enable an individual to sustain any future housing. The Council is committed to flexible provision, rather than agreeing set numbers of move-on allocations per year.

Improving access to all move-on accommodation, and supporting referral routes into specialist supported temporary accommodation, is necessary to:

- Meet local housing need;

- Prevent recurring housing problems for high risk groups; and

- Reduce the need for intervention by officers within Strategic Housing.

To achieve Key Objective 2 the Council and its partners must understand the move-on pathways available, the demand on each of these pathways and the processes that underpin their operation. Future resource investment needs to be planned to make sure that move-on pathways support the prevention and tenancy sustainment objectives of this strategy.

3) Developing the Council's private rented sector access scheme (including adoption of the power to discharge the full homelessness duty with a final offer of suitable private rented sector accommodation)

The Council has been working to develop its private rented sector access scheme (the Deposit Guarantee Scheme, "DGS") and in autumn 2013 will re-brand a revised service offer as "Help to Rent".   The scheme has been operating in the Borough for a number of years and is used as a preventative measure against homelessness by helping families who are unable to raise the deposit needed to access the private rented sector.

The service due to be launched as Help to Rent will place greater emphasis on the role officers can play to:

- Guarantee landlords are fit and proper persons;

- Inspect properties and work with landlords to achieve high property standards;

- Ensure tenants' financial capability;

- Promote tenancy sustainment and development of life skills;

- Support long letting periods;

- Mediate as a third party to resolve tenancy issues;

- Signpost tenants to other appropriate services;

- Encourage saving so that tenants can afford their own deposit in the future.

In its Housing Strategy 2013-2018 the Council has committed to adopt the new freedom to discharge the full homelessness duty into the private rented sector. With this power the Government wants to give local housing authorities freedom to make:

- More efficient use of their stock; and

- Better use of good-quality private sector accommodation.

The Government believes that while people who face homelessness need suitable accommodation, they do not necessarily need social housing, and may be in a position to manage a private rented tenancy.

Those households in housing need who may be suitable for housing in the private rented sector will need to be identified at the earliest opportunity to support the tenant-property matching process.

The work to revise the existing DGS as Help to Rent has included the aim of delivering a private rented access scheme with the capacity and service standard guarantees that could be used to discharge the full homelessness duty where a property, and the property-match to a homeless household, is suitable.

To achieve Key Objective 2 the Council will project manage the implementation of the new Help to Rent service and then monitor its successful delivery. The Council needs to make the best use of this power, while managing associated risks and putting in place the measures to support tenancy sustainment.

4) Monitoring the impact of the new Housing Allocations Policy

The Council's new Housing Allocations Policy is due to be implemented in autumn 2013 and states that for applicants to the housing register who receive a positive homelessness decision, there will be a presumption to make one direct offer of suitable accommodation. This direct offer could be for a council or housing association property, or to private rented accommodation. With rising numbers of homeless households this

will allow the Council to manage its stock more flexibly to best meet the needs of different households.

The Council has started work to build specialist skills into its allocations service so that once the new Housing Allocations Policy has been implemented there are the necessary links with the homelessness and private rented sector teams to identify both suitable properties and suitable matches to households with the full homelessness duty.

The Council will set out clearly its internal procedure for identifying those client groups or individuals who would not be considered as suitable for being made an offer in the private rented sector.

The aim for using direct lets for all homeless households, whether being re-housed in council, housing association or private rented sector accommodation, is to:

- Improve the flexible allocation of properties to better meet the needs of all households seeking re-housing through the housing register;

- Introduce efficiencies in the planned re-use of temporary accommodation voids;

- Increase the number of re-housing opportunities for homeless households and reduce waiting times in temporary accommodation; and

- Support the Council's message encouraging households to engage with prevention work, and to avoid crisis even where the Council would make a positive homelessness decision, no longer a direct route to social housing;

To achieve Key Objective 2 the Council will monitor the impact of this policy in order to understand:

- The policy's contribution to the aims of this objective and the strategy;

- The number of suitable properties able to be identified in the private rented sector;

- The frequency of successful offers in the private rented sector; and

- The tenancy sustainment success rate over the first 24 months of tenancies in the private rented sector.

The action plan

Key objective	Action	Team Resources	Financial Resources	Timeframes	Officer responsible
KO2	Complete existing projects to lease, acquire and build new temporary accommodation	Housing Development Team	Within existing budgets	To report on progress quarterly, last completion date for existing projects is March 2015	Jack Burnham
KO2	Achieve a total of 100 temporary accommodation units	Housing Development Team	Within existing budgets	All units to be available for use by Dec 2018	Jack Burnham
KO2	Introduce a new reporting measure on overall numbers of households placed into all forms of temporary accommodation	Housing Advice and Homelessness Team Leader	No budget impact	To be introduced by Sept 2013	Natasha Brathwaite
KO2	Review demand and provision of move-on pathways and report to GM	Strategic Housing, Team Leaders	No budget impact	To commence in 2014 and link to work for the Young Persons Housing Strategy	Natasha Brathwaite
KO2	Launch a revised private sector access scheme offer under the brand 'Help to Rent'	Private Rent Team	Within existing budgets	To launch new service in Sept 2013	Isabel Connolly
KO2	Monitor direct lets to homeless households under the new Housing Allocations Policy	Strategic Housing, Team Leaders	No budget impact	To commence from policy implementation date and to report monthly to GM	Teresa Wood

KO2	Introduce an internal procedure on use of the freedom to discharge the full homelessness duty into the private rented sector	Strategic Housing, Team Leaders	Within existing budgets	Procedure in place by Dec 2013	Isabel Connolly
KO2	Monitor use of the freedom to discharge the full homelessness duty into the private rented sector and report to GM	Strategic Housing, Team Leaders	No budget impact	To commence from commencement of use of freedom and to report monthly to GM	Isabel Connolly

KEY OBJECTIVE 3

To provide support to prevent repeat homelessness and improve outcomes for people who are homeless or threatened with homelessness

Gold Standard Local Challenges related to this Key Objective:

Adopt a *No Second Night Out* model or an effective local alternative.

Have housing pathways agreed or in development with each key partner and client group that includes appropriate accommodation and support.

Actively work in partnership with voluntary sector and other local partners to address support, education, employment and training needs.

Key areas for investment and improvement identified in the Homelessness Service Review related to this this Key Objective:

- Tenancy sustainability and improving outcomes
  - ➢ Pre-tenancy training
  - ➢ Welfare and support provision
  - ➢ Appropriate move-on pathways
  - ➢ Training and work programmes

- Internal processes
  - ➢ Structured training programme for staff

To meet Key Objective 3 this strategy commits to:

1) Increasing tenancy sustainment

Once a household has lost a tenancy and been through homelessness this acts as a red flag to the Council and its partners that a household may need some assistance to avoid future tenancy failure. Tenancy sustainment is used as a term to encapsulate a number of measures that may be put in place by the council or its partners before a household is re-housed into settled accommodation, and often for the initial period of the settled tenancy, with an aim of making future tenancy failure less likely. Tenancy sustainment work can very broadly be broken down into:

- Developing skills to prevent tenancy failure within the first year
    - money and debt management, budgeting, benefits and rent payments
    - other life skills for daily living, including those specific to particular groups such as managing addictions or caring for very young children;

- Developing skills to support long-term tenancy sustainment
    - support to the household to manage their health and social networks
    - methods for improving self-esteem, confidence and motivation
    - opportunities for training programmes and access to the back-to-work pathway.

There are benefits from investing in tenancy sustainment work for all parties, and the need to 'get it right' is high, given that a reoccurrence of homelessness:

- Is very expensive;

- Represents a failure of re-housing; and

- Creates a further crisis for a household that may have long-term detrimental effects.

The Council is committed to investing resources in improving tenancy sustainment to achieve a long-term improvement in the outcomes for homeless households and reducing repeat homelessness. It has been recognised that there is no simple solution to improving tenancy sustainment and the Council has started working on multiple prongs to this work:

- A review of the welfare and support service, including
    - increasing the staff resource available;
    - adoption of the Outcome Star model for support planning with specialist staff training,
    - review of the referral pathways into the service for households in temporary accommodation and those supported through mediation to remain in their current housing arrangement, and
    - moving the service onto a paperless system;

- Introduction of a specialist debt and welfare role into the service;

- An increase in the tenancy sustainment work to be carried out by officers as part of the new service offer for the Council's private rented sector access scheme when it is launched as Help to Rent in 2013;

- Development of a pre-tenancy training programme for households accessing the welfare and support service and for any households wanting to access a tenancy through the Help to Rent scheme; and

- Development of a Digital Access strategy with the Council's Tenants and Leaseholders Service.

The Council's partnership work is essential to its tenancy sustainment objectives and multi-agency agreements and referral routes are central to this. The Council is committed to attending regular liaison meetings, attendance at case conferences and reviews, participation at forum meetings and joint working events.

To achieve Key Objective 3 the Council will maintain its commitment to investment in tenancy sustainment. The Council commits to improving its monitoring of these services to assess the positive outcomes being achieved and to better demonstrate the value and long-term savings for the service.

2) Developing the training and back-to-work pathway

There are a number of resources available in the Borough providing services to the unemployed. Through these resources individuals can tap into a support network, free training, skills learning, volunteer opportunities, and back-to-work arrangements. Individuals and households experiencing benefit cuts are being looked to by the Government to increasingly support themselves by accessing paid work opportunities.

The Council recognises that the work and housing pathways are inter-related and that for an individual or household to succeed in the long-term on either pathway, both need to be considered together, and where appropriate, supported.

To achieve Key Objective 3 the Council has committed to developing in-house knowledge of the services and support networks available, and to providing more specialist training for officers to understand the importance of work to long-term tenancy sustainability and improving outcomes. This work will be carried out in partnership with the Council's Tenants and Leaseholders Service.

3) Case conferences for non-priority homeless households

For those households who receive a positive homelessness decision from the Council there is a pathway back into settled accommodation that can be supported by tenancy sustainment work. Where households access housing through other pathways, facilitated by the Council and its partners, tenancy sustainment can be achieved whether in supported housing or a move into the private rented sector. However, the success of this work is very much affected by a homeless person or household's ability and willingness to engage. Once people with complex needs are involved in cycles of homelessness the route to tenancy sustainment may present a much greater challenge, and there can be a long-term cost for many parties involved. In these cases the Council and agencies can achieve more by working together to share information and successful practices, and plan resources flexibly.

The Council's partners have provided feedback through recent forum events hosted by the Council that they would benefit from a multi-agency arrangement in the Borough that provided the mechanism for triggering multi-agency, housing-centred case conferences for non-priority individuals of any age (i.e. not necessarily a young person) who may present a complicated case and have so far failed to engage with a single agency successfully.

Work has been started to develop a framework for such conferences to take place that would achieve the aims of partners involved. Although the Council has no statutory duty to re-house non-priority households, the Council is in a position to play a hosting role for such conferences.

To achieve Key Objective 3 the Council is committed to supporting partnership work to improve outcomes for vulnerably housed non-priority individuals and recognises the benefits to the community. Case conferences are an opportunity for partners to work together through a mechanism with low cost implications, and which could benefit all, by improving the sharing and targeting of resources for individuals who are repeatedly a high cost to the system.

4) No Second Night Out

For individuals not engaging in a pathway back to settled accommodation the challenge to improve their outcomes is hard and the costs to individuals and communities can be high. The No Second Night Out project began as a pilot throughout London, based on four pledges that underpin a commitment to end rough sleeping:

1. No one new to the streets should spend a second night out

2. No one should make their home on the streets

3. No one should return to the streets once they have been helped off them

4. Ultimately, no one should arrive on the streets

Members of the public are able to help report rough sleepers, rough sleepers can access safety, services and advice on their options, and where rough sleepers are not from the area the aim is to reconnect them back to their local area, unless there is a good reason why they cannot return.

There are a small yet persistent number of people sleeping rough in the Borough (less than 10 at the last count). There is also a small number of single homeless people who cannot secure a place in the Borough's night shelters, either because of an issue with their background or a lack of bed-spaces in the night shelter. There is no existing model for No Second Night Out within the Borough and therefore these individuals are referred to agencies outside of the Borough, which is less appropriate.

The Council's hostel plans will include the integration of emergency, one night accommodation. To make the most of the space there, and in order to provide emergency, single-use bed spaces the new hostel will have an integrated crash pad. The crash pad will be located in a convertible room in the hostel; during the day the space will operate as a training room and in the evening will be converted into one or more emergency bed spaces. This is somewhere rough sleepers can be referred to,

knowing that they will be assessed in the morning, and then if appropriate signposted or referred.

This model is in line with NSNO nationwide and contributes to the aims of this objective and strategy because:

- No one new to the streets should spend a second night out; and

- No one should make their home on the streets.

The numbers of rough sleepers in the Borough are low, and the Council is therefore committed to going beyond No Second Night Out to implement a No First Night Out model within the lifecycle of this strategy. Work on this model will accompany the development of a Young Persons Housing strategy in 2014/15 committed to in the Housing Strategy 2013-2018. The aim of this work will be to understand why young people are falling into homelessness by establishing the routes to becoming vulnerably housed or rough sleeping, and then developing a model with pathways to prevent this.

To achieve Key Objective 3 the Council is committed to a partnership approach, recognising that referral and signposting pathways are essential to preventing both rough sleeping and repeat negative outcomes. The specific expectations for the management of the crash pad service will be set out in the service level agreement for the service provider running the hostel. Usage and outcomes will then need to be monitored and assessed to understand the impact of this measure in meeting this objective.

The action plan

Key objective	Action	Team Resources	Financial Resources	Timeframes	Officer responsible
KO3	Review of welfare and support service	Housing Advice and Homelessness Team Leader	Within existing budgets	To commence in Sept 2013 and new ways of working to be implemented by March2014	Natasha Brathwaite
KO3	Introduction of a pre-tenancy training programme	Cross-department working group	Within existing budgets	To be implemented by Jan 2014	Natasha Brathwaite
KO3	Digital Access strategy	Strategic Housing and Tenants and Leaseholders Service Team Leaders	Within existing budgets	To be completed by April 2014 with timescales for work in an action plan	Isabel Connolly
KO3	Increase internal knowledge across housing services of local training and back-to-work pathways	Strategic Housing and Tenants and Leaseholders Service Team Leaders	No budget impact	Information collection to be completed by April 2014 with plan for dissemination to staff	Natasha Brathwaite
KO3	Set up of case conference structure for non-priority households with clear terms of reference	Strategic Housing Team Leaders with partners	Within existing budgets	To be completed by April 2014, usage and outcomes to be monitored quarterly via Corvu	Isabel Connolly
KO3	No Second Night Out model to be provided within the service level agreement for the new homeless hostel	Housing Development Team	Within agreed budgets	Hostel construction to be completed by March 2015	Jack Burnham

| KO3 | Research into routes of becoming vulnerably housed or a rough sleeper in Dacorum | Strategy & Policy Team | Within existing budgets | To commence in 2014 and link to work for the Young Persons Housing Strategy | Isabel Connolly |

KEY OBJECTIVE 4

To tackle the root causes of homelessness through much earlier intervention and prevention through education

Gold Standard Local Challenges related to this Key Objective:

Adopt a corporate commitment to prevent homelessness which has buy in across all local authority services.

Actively work in partnership with voluntary sector and other local partners to address support, education, employment and training needs.

Key areas for investment and improvement identified in the Homelessness Service Review related to this this Key Objective:

- **Prevention**
  - ➢ Communicate realistic expectations to households unlikely to be re-housed through the housing register and provide advice on alternative housing options
  - ➢ Early intervention programmes in schools, education settings and community groups

To meet Key Objective 4 this strategy commits to:

1) An education programme

For many young people, what they know about housing they have learnt from their family or friends. This will include, where relevant, any experiences of working with the local authority or other local housing providers. Policies, services, and demand all change over time, particularly in the current economic and social policy environment, which means that what young people "know" about housing often does not relate to the current reality in the Borough. The Council and its partners have recognised the need to educate young people and to tackle the root causes of homelessness by preventing young people making decisions that will negatively impact on their housing situation. To be successful, work being carried out for this objective will feed into broader corporate projects to tackle deprivation and child poverty, and the development of a Youth Involvement strategy in 2013.

Young people need to be able to access information that is accessible and meaningful to them, and which they feel comfortable engaging with. Information should be specific to the policies and services in the Borough, and could make use of real-life stories.

There is a shared view from the Council and partners that work needs to be carried out to communicate:

- A message about the change in the role of the Housing Register – no longer a solution to the housing needs of many; and

- The realities of the private rented sector.

Overall aims are to:

- Raise awareness of homelessness among young people, particularly during secondary years;

- Prevent homelessness by encouraging young people to remain living at home;

- Help young people understand the reality of living alone and the need to make plans for the future;

- Demonstrate the realities of homelessness, and why in most cases, it is best for a young person to continue to live at home (including the help available for when home is not safe);

- Explore the issues that could lead to homelessness and provide advice on dealing with these issues;

- Raise awareness of the realities of living alone such as costs, budgeting, and the living skills required; and

- Provide young people and teachers with a lasting message about housing and homelessness.

The Council has recently started a piece of cross-departmental work to develop a 'schools programme' offer to schools across the Borough, both primary and secondary. This piece of work is being supported by the Council's corporate structures and has been selected as a mayoral initiative. The housing service will be able to work through this framework to offer a programme out to schools that will include age specific:

- Resource packs to help young people understand the reality of living alone and the need to make plans for the future;

- Lesson plans, worksheets and curriculum outcomes;

- Materials relating to housing options, homelessness and local schemes Dacorum;

- Peer education through young people who have experienced homelessness sharing their stories.

The educational message about housing that the Council and its partners want to achieve through this objective will have the greatest impact if accessible to young people through more than one source. Schools and other educational settings will form part of this approach, alongside channels outside of schools such as youth groups, referral units and schemes for young families.

A number of the Council's partners who provide housing and support services to young people have offered their time and expertise to develop the programme.

To meet Key Objective 4 the Council will prioritise the development of a programme through this framework, recognising the long-term benefits for preventing homelessness.

2) Dissemination of housing options information through providers of other services

For households who may be working with services s it is essential that housing information and messages are consistent with the local facts about housing and realities specific to people living within the Borough.

Households accessing services from health and support providers, such as health visitors, district nurses, and Thriving Families key workers, develop relationships of trust, often over a long period of time. If providers of services that work very closely with families are able to provide accurate and realistic advice about housing in the Borough, there are real preventative benefits that could be achieved.

Housing services cannot expect that all health and support professionals will know and understand the housing options available in the Borough, and the potential impact of these for young people. The Council recognises that there is work to be carried out in providing this information to service providers in a way that allows them to make housing information meaningful to young people.

To meet Key Objective 4 the Council is committed to carrying out this work with partners, to make sure that future benefits from disseminating this information are maximised.

3) Identifying educational and community settings more likely to be attended by young people at greater risk of experiencing housing need to target resources

Beyond educational settings there are numerous other community services that work with young people or young families. The Council and its partners do not have the resources to target all of these, and it is recognised that not all of these settings will be attended by individuals likely to experience housing need.

There needs to be a planned approach to use of resources, so that they can be targeted to where the potential to carry out real prevention work are greatest. For this planning to occur the Council and its partner's first need to understand the settings within the Borough and the demographic trends of individuals accessing these, or in some cases specific client groups.

To meet Key Objective 4 the Council is committed to carrying out this mapping exercise and to feeding this into broader corporate work on deprivation and evidence base collection.

4) Ensuring educational programmes are sustained over the life-cycle of this strategy

One of the main pitfalls of educational programmes is that once set up they can run for a year or so and then disappear as officers involved get reabsorbed into dealing with day-to-day priorities and caseloads.

To make a real long-term difference to prevention and early intervention the Council recognises that this kind of snap-shot approach to delivery will not be successful. The educational message needs to be persistent and access young people through a number of channels and over a period of time to make a real difference to decision making.

To achieve Key Objective 4 the Council commits to maintaining an educational programme throughout the lifecycle of this policy and to monitoring the impact and outcomes from the different forms of resource targeting.

The action plan

Key objective	Action	Team Resources	Financial Resources	Timeframes	Officer responsible
KO4	Develop and deliver an offer to schools as part of the mayoral initiative	Strategic Housing, cross-department working group	Within existing budgets	Offer to be complete by July 2013 with a summer pilot, delivery to commence in Sept 2013 with termly reporting	Natasha Brathwaite
KO4	Develop resources for providers of care and support services working with households who may be in housing need	Strategy & Policy Team	Within existing budgets	To be completed by March 2014 with plan for dissemination to providers	Isabel Connolly
KO4	Develop a planned approach to targeting resources that identifies those educational and community settings more likely to be attended by young people at greater risk of experiencing housing need	Strategic Housing Team Leaders	Within existing budgets	To commence in 2014 and link to work for the Young Persons Housing Strategy	Isabel Connolly

APPENDIX A - The action plan

Key objective	Action	Team Resources	Financial Resources	Timeframes	Officer responsible
KO1	Service review of all staff roles within the Strategic Housing service	Within strategic housing team	Within current budgets	To be completed by Dec 2013	Julia Hedger
KO1	Set up of a structured staff training programme including training available through the Gold Standard	All relevant staff - attendance to be monitored by Team Leaders.	Within current training budget	To be in place by Dec 2013	Natasha Brathwaite
KO1	Set up a staff working group to monitor use of IT systems and assess whether full benefits are being achieved	Strategic Housing Team Leaders	No budget implications initially – will be dependent on recommendations whether budget impact next year	To be set up in Sept 2013 and to report back in March 2014 to SH Group Manager	Isabel Connolly
KO1	Develop scripts for the new CSU contract	Strategic Housing: all teams	No budget impact	To be completed by Sept 2013	Julia Hedger
KO1	Set up a framework for staff across Strategic Housing to audit the CSU service level agreement	Strategic Housing: Team Leaders	No budget impact	Audits to be carried out quarterly as per CSU SLA	Julia Hedger
KO1	Plan communications material on the front-of-office services and the measures that will be in place during the decant from the Civic Centre	Strategic Housing Team Leaders and Communications	Within current budgets	To be completed by March 2014	Isabel Connolly
KO1	Set up an online housing options self-assessment tool	Strategy and Policy Team	Computer system already purchased so no further impact on budget	To be set up by Oct 2013 and usage monitored quarterly via Corvu	Isabel Connolly

KO1	Develop and update the Council's webpages relating to the housing service	Strategy and Policy Team	No budget impact	To be set up by Oct 2013 and usage monitored quarterly via Corvu	Isabel Connolly
KO1	Set up online social media forums to provide quick responses to queries	Strategy and Policy Team	No budget impact	To be set up by Jan 2014 and usage monitored quarterly via Corvu	Isabel Connolly
KO1	Provide internal staff and partners with a comprehensive directory of services	Strategy and Policy Team	Within current budgets	To be in place by Oct 2013 and updated quarterly through the Homeless Forum	Isabel Connolly
KO2	Complete existing projects to lease, acquire and build new temporary accommodation	Housing Development Team	Within existing budgets	To report on progress quarterly, last completion date for existing projects is March 2015	Jack Burnham
KO2	Achieve a total of 100 temporary accommodation units	Housing Development Team	Within existing budgets	All units to be available for use by Dec 2018	Jack Burnham
KO2	Introduce a new reporting measure on overall numbers of households placed into all forms of temporary accommodation	Housing Advice and Homelessness Team Leader	No budget impact	To be introduced by Sept 2013	Natasha Brathwaite
KO2	Review demand and provision of move-on pathways and report to GM	Strategic Housing, Team Leaders	No budget impact	To commence in 2014 and link to work for the Young Persons Housing Strategy	Natasha Brathwaite

KO2	Launch a revised private sector access scheme offer under the brand 'Help to Rent'	Private Rent Team	Within existing budgets	To launch new service in Sept 2013	Isabel Connolly
KO2	Monitor direct lets to homeless households under the new Housing Allocations Policy	Strategic Housing, Team Leaders	No budget impact	To commence from policy implementati on date and to report monthly to GM	Teresa Wood
KO2	Introduce an internal procedure on use of the freedom to discharge the full homelessness duty into the private rented sector	Strategic Housing, Team Leaders	Within existing budgets	Procedure in place by Dec 2013	Isabel Connolly
KO2	Monitor use of the freedom to discharge the full homelessness duty into the private rented sector and report to GM	Strategic Housing, Team Leaders	No budget impact	To commence from commencem ent of use of freedom and to report monthly to GM	Isabel Connolly
KO3	Review of welfare and support service	Housing Advice and Homelessness Team Leader	Within existing budgets	To commence in Sept 2013 and new ways of working to be implemented by March2014	Natasha Brathwaite
KO3	Introduction of a pre-tenancy training programme	Cross-department working group	Within existing budgets	To be implemented by Jan 2014	Natasha Brathwaite

KO3	Digital Access strategy	Strategic Housing and Tenants and Leaseholders Service Team Leaders	Within existing budgets	To be completed by April 2014 with timescales for work in an action plan	Isabel Connolly
KO3	Increase internal knowledge across housing services of local training and back-to-work pathways	Strategic Housing and Tenants and Leaseholders Service Team Leaders	No budget impact	Information collection to be completed by April 2014 with plan for dissemination to staff	Natasha Brathwaite
KO3	Set up of case conference structure for non-priority households with clear terms of reference	Strategic Housing Team Leaders with partners	Within existing budgets	To be completed by April 2014, usage and outcomes to be monitored quarterly via Corvu	Isabel Connolly
KO3	No Second Night Out model to be provided within the service level agreement for the new homeless hostel	Housing Development Team	Within agreed budgets	Hostel construction to be completed by March 2015	Jack Burnham
KO3	Research into routes of becoming vulnerably housed or a rough sleeper in Dacorum	Strategy & Policy Team	Within existing budgets	To commence in 2014 and link to work for the Young Persons Housing Strategy	Isabel Connolly
KO4	Develop and deliver an offer to schools as part of the mayoral initiative	Strategic Housing, cross-department working group	Within existing budgets	Offer to be complete by July 2013 with a summer pilot, delivery to commence in Sept 2013 with termly reporting	Natasha Brathwaite

KO4	Develop resources for providers of care and support services working with households who may be in housing need	Strategy & Policy Team	Within existing budgets	To be completed by March 2014 with plan for dissemination to providers	Isabel Connolly
KO4	Develop a planned approach to targeting resources that identifies those educational and community settings more likely to be attended by young people at greater risk of experiencing housing need	Strategic Housing Team Leaders	Within existing budgets	To commence in 2014 and link to work for the Young Persons Housing Strategy	Isabel Connolly