



Young Persons' Housing Strategy

2016 - 2020

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Working in partnership, to create a Borough which enables the communities of Dacorum to thrive and prosper

Affordable Housing ♦ Regeneration ♦ Building Community Capacity ♦ Safe and Clean Environment ♦ Dacorum Delivers

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Foreword

I am pleased to introduce this Young Persons' Housing Strategy for Dacorum Borough Council, developed with support and input from partners, tenants and leaseholders, and applicants on its housing register. It provides a strategic plan covering five years, and identifies four key strategic objectives that will drive future action.

Dacorum recognises the role its young people play in contributing to a vibrant community and is proud to boast a low unemployment rate among younger adults. However, we recognise the housing challenges faced by many of our younger population and the resulting negative consequences this can have on the lives of individuals and families choosing to make Dacorum their home.

We hope that this strategy will help us to offer a housing service that better meets the needs of young people and that by changing the way we think about and use our resources today we can have a positive impact on young people's futures.

Cllr M Griffiths
Portfolio Holder for Housing

1. Introduction to the strategy

- 1.1 Dacorum Borough Council (the Council) believes that its young people are part of the key to its continued economic success and growth of inclusive, positive communities. The Council works hard to promote a healthy borough where people can live feeling safe and happy. The need for good, suitable housing is central to people's wellbeing, and the Council recognises that poor housing can lead to numerous negative consequences for individuals and families.
- 1.2 For the purposes of this strategy 'young people' include people from the age of 16 to 25. However, different sections of this strategy will focus on specific age ranges within this, and some data available for analysis will reference broader age groups.
- 1.3 There are many reasons for young people to have a relationship with the Council's housing service:
- As a statutory local housing authority
 - providing a housing advice and homeless prevention service;
 - investigating people's situations as homeless or threatened with homelessness;
 - providing temporary accommodation during periods of homelessness (not responsible for children under 16);
 - managing the local housing register and making allocations of social housing (council and housing association properties);
 - setting move-on agreements with partners who provide services to vulnerable young people and care leavers
 - As a third party link to private sector landlords through a deposit guarantee scheme
 - setting up viewings and sign ups;
 - providing third party mediation and support during a private sector tenancy
 - As the main social landlord in the borough
 - providing a tenancy contract and housing management service;
 - collecting rent and water rates;
 - providing a tenancy sustainment service to those at greater risk of losing their tenancy;
 - carrying out planned and responsive maintenance to properties
- 1.4 As a statutory authority involved in young people's lives at a time when they are vulnerable through the experience of homelessness, the Council must ensure that its services and accommodation are suitable to meet the needs of those it is required to assist. The Council believes that understanding what is suitable should be about both limiting harm to individuals and families, and, where possible, increasing wellbeing and access to positive opportunities.
- 1.5 The Council is committed to a strong partnership with Hertfordshire County Council (HCC) so that children and young people who come under their care are supported appropriately.
- 1.6 The Council is a partner to charities and agencies providing support and accommodation services to some young individuals the Council is not required to assist. Through a strong partnership the Council can support the work and aims of these organisations. A partnership approach is central to this strategy (see section 4.).

- 1.7 As a social landlord the Council has a privileged role in the lives of many young people across the borough, and it is committed to shaping its services in a way that promotes their wellbeing and increases chances of successful tenancies that enable younger tenants to make a positive contribution to their community.

2. Strategic context

- 2.1 the Council's Vision and Corporate Objectives for 2012 – 2015 have shaped the Housing Strategy 2013 – 2018 and Homelessness Strategy 2013 – 2018. Affordable housing has been one of five corporate objectives, recognising the contribution housing makes to the bigger picture of a thriving borough.
- 2.2 The Council's Housing Strategy 2013 – 2018 recognises a need to “develop its data and information base on black and minority ethnic groups, the housing status of young people, and the accommodation solutions for disabled people.” The development of this Young Persons' Housing Strategy starts the Council's journey to better understand the housing status of young people.
- 2.3 The Council's Homelessness Strategy 2013 – 2018 commits to detailed objectives, some of which link directly to this new strategy.

The first objective “To make every contact count in the primary prevention of homelessness” commits the Council to working as part of a ‘joint front door’ initiative with HCC and Herts Young Homeless (HYH) to ensure that 16 and 17 year olds presenting as homeless receive a consistent service regardless of whose ‘front door’ they present.

The second objective “To secure suitable and affordable accommodation for people who are homeless or threatened with homelessness” commits the Council to increasing temporary accommodation options and implementing a new strategy for temporary accommodation.

The third objective “To provide support to prevent repeat homelessness and improve outcomes for people who are homeless or threatened with homelessness” commits the Council to a tenancy sustainment approach that supports people:

- during crisis to mitigate harm and move people to a position where they can achieve some wellbeing; and
- to develop skills that will prevent tenancy failure within the first year for people taking on a tenancy for the first time, or for people who have experienced a period of homelessness or other crisis.

The third objective also commits to adopting a ‘No Second Night Out’ (NSNO) model to preventing rough sleeping. The Council's Elms hostel includes emergency, one night accommodation in the form of an integrated crash pad. This provision will help the Council and its partners ensure that people in the borough do not have to rough sleep. As part of adopting this approach, the Homelessness Strategy recognised the importance of understanding why young people fall into homelessness by establishing the routes to becoming vulnerably housed or rough sleeping.

The fourth objective “To tackle the root causes of homelessness through much earlier intervention and prevention through education” commits the Council to making sure that young people have access to information that is meaningful to them, and which they feel comfortable engaging with. In order to achieve this, the objective commits to developing a communication strategy for young people including social media.

3. Local provision

3.1 Council provision

The housing service does not currently have any explicit focus of resources on younger people as part of its service offer. However, many aspects of its service have had to develop to understand the needs of younger people, especially where they make up the majority of the population in question (homeless presentations, temporary accommodation, rent arrears, etc).

The Council has a welfare and support service for people with a homeless application, and tenants in the Council's housing stock can be referred to a tenancy sustainment team if they are presenting with complex needs.

The Council's 'Resident Services' department provide services to all residents within the borough, and have some specifically targeted at children and teenagers (and for some activities up to the age of 25 for care leavers) such as the adventure playgrounds and Dacorum Youth Forum.

3.2 Hertfordshire County Council – 'Families First' and 'Early Help'

The Strategy for Early Help in Hertfordshire states the following:

The economic argument for Early Help and family focussed approaches is that more effective assessment and a swifter, coordinated response will ultimately lead to a reduction in the numbers of families whose needs have to be met by specialist and high cost services. 'Backing the Future' a report by the New Economics Foundation and Action for Children estimated that for every £1 invested in early help, there is a financial benefit to society of between £7.60 and £9.20.

The Council is committed to working in partnership with this county-led initiative and developing a way of working alongside county and other partner services that is consistent with a 'whole family' approach, and which also aims to prevent duplication of support.

3.3 Local providers of housing services for young people in Dacorum

Aldwyck Housing Group - Young Persons Service (YPS)

Aldwyck's YPS provides temporary supported accommodation for young people aged 16-25 years old who are homeless or in housing need for a maximum period of 18 months. YPS have a supported scheme in Berkhamsted (Swan Foyer). This project supports young people to establish an independent lifestyle so that they can sustain a successful tenancy in their own independent accommodation.

Swan Foyer also has a Crashpad bed space for HYH.

Aldwyck provide floating support to 16—25 year olds in Dacorum on behalf of HYH. This service will normally begin when a young person is in temporary or emergency accommodation, although there are times when support workers will help young people who are still living at home, with friends or with extended family. Floating Support workers help young people to understand what it means to live independently and support them achieving this.

Hertfordshire County Council (HCC)

HCC children's care services have a duty of care to all homeless children under 18 years old.

HCC children's centres provide a range of services that support parents and carers. They work with partners including health visitors, midwives, schools, pre-schools, childcare providers and community groups to provide access to universal early years services

HCC Youth Connexions is a support service for all 13—19 year olds (25 for care leavers). Their focus is on personal development and advice.

Herts Young Homeless (HYH)

HYH supports young people, 16—24 year olds, in crisis and at risk of homelessness

HYH provide a free, confidential advice service.

A mediation service works with people who are experiencing arguments at home. Mediators offer fair and unbiased support.

A dual diagnosis service is available to support people who are homeless or at risk of homelessness and have mental health and substance misuse problems.

A substance misuse service is available to support users and their carers where an individual is at risk of losing their home as a result of their substance misuse.

HYH have volunteers who offer temporary emergency accommodation in their homes for the sole use of a young person.

HYH deliver a 'Home Truths' education program to young people to prepare them for the realities of leaving home and living independently, and informs them of the options, support and advice available.

Hightown Housing Association

Hightown have a temporary supported accommodation project for young people aged between 16 - 25 years in Dacorum (George Street). This is available to a variety of young people including those who are homeless, those leaving care or those who are estranged from family or may have difficulty sustaining education, training or employment.

A mother and baby service in Dacorum provides accommodation and support to young women aged 16 - 25 who are either pregnant, or have a child up to 12 months old.

4. Partnership approach

4.1 To be successful this strategy will need collaboration and joint planning with partners. The housing service is committed to making strong partnerships a long-term reality, and putting these central to achieving its strategic objectives.

A partnership strategy is due to be developed in 2016 and this will support these goals and set out a clear picture for how the Council and its partners will work together.

Partners can help to the Council to understand the reasons for local challenges and how to respond to them.

The Council has legal responsibilities in regard to both safeguarding, and preventing and identifying radicalisation. This strategy supports these responsibilities, by giving the housing service a strategic plan to meet the needs of younger people, including those who are vulnerable.

5. National report

5.1 St Basil's (2015) national report "Positive Pathways to Adulthood" found that:

- Young people face greater economic disadvantage in the national housing market than any other group. Average incomes are lower as young people continue education and/or start work, they lack experience in finding and sustaining accommodation, and are more likely to experience discrimination by landlords due to age-associated perceptions about risks as prospective tenants.
- More young people are remaining in the parental home for longer, or returning back to the parental home. This increased by 25% between 1996 and 2013.
- There was a 43% rise between 2008/09 to 2012/13 in young people aged 16 – 24 renting in the private sector.
- In some parts of the South East there are very few opportunities for young people on low incomes to access the private rented sector, despite the best efforts of agencies to offer private landlords tenant-finder schemes and additional incentives.
- The Shared Accommodation Rate combined with reductions to the level of housing benefit payable locally is reported by both Crisis and Homeless Link to be having a significant impact on the availability of private rented accommodation, and in particular on the under 25 year old group, who are reported to be being displaced out of the market by the 26-35 year old group.
- Within the overall 16 – 24 cohort are a group of young people who have been identified by housing academics as having 'chaotic' housing pathways, who are in part identified through their experience of homelessness. There is an absence of coherent pro-active housing policy for this group.
- Additional pressure on younger age groups will come from further benefit reductions in real terms and in particular the impending changes to welfare benefits for 18 to 21 year olds – the ending of automatic entitlement to housing benefit and the introduction of a Youth Obligation with stronger and more time limited conditionality than JSA.

6. Local picture – population and service data

6.1 Census 2011 age population data for Dacorum is shown below. More than half the population is aged 45 or over. Adults under 25 make up 9.8% of the adult population, all adults under 30 make up 17.5%, and all adults under 44 make up 45%.

Age	Number	Percentage (%)	Percentage of adult population (%)
0 - 15	28864	19.9	
16 - 17	3802	2.6	
18 to 19	3037	2.1	2.7
20 to 24	7919	5.5	7.1
25 to 29	8671	6.0	7.7
30 to 44	30941	21.4	27.6
45 to 59	30356	21.0	27.1
60 to 64	8374	5.8	7.5
65 to 74	11310	7.8	10.1
75 to 84	8198	5.7	7.3
85 to 89	2267	1.6	2.0
90 and over	1108	0.8	1.0
Total 18 - 24	10956	7.6	9.8
Total 18 - 29	19627	13.6	17.5
Total 18 - 44	50568	35	45

Source: www.ukcensusdata.com

- 6.2 Household projections by household type for Dacorum 2011 – 2021 show that the greatest increase in household type is projected to be lone parents. DWP data from 2015 showed that 41% of children in single parent families live in relative poverty, around twice the risk of relative poverty faced by children in couple families (24%).

Household type	2011	2021	Change	% Change
One person households	18000	19000	1000	5.5%
One family and no others: couple households	28000	29000	1000	3.6%
Couple and one or more other adults	7000	7000	0	0.0%
Lone parent (with or without one or more other adults)	4000	6000	2000	50.0%
Other households	3000	4000	1000	33.3%
All households	60000	65000	5000	8.3%

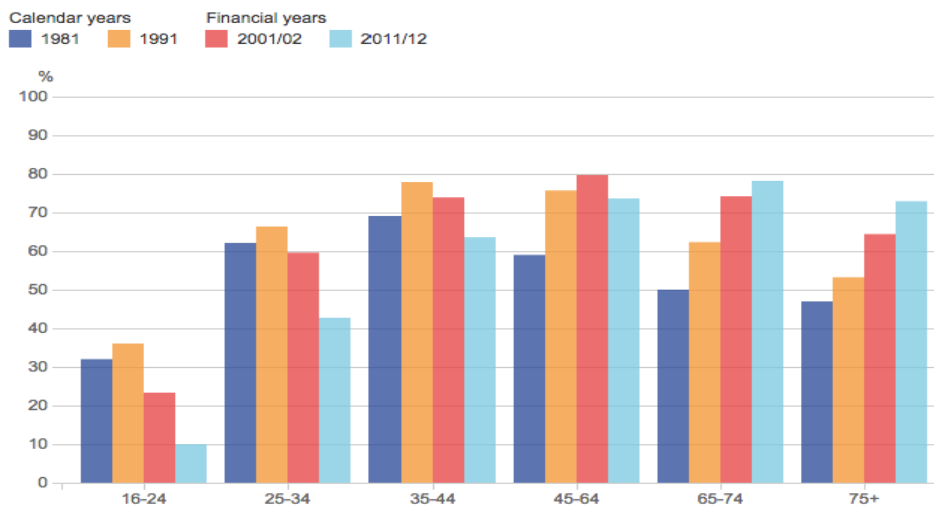
Source: CLG 2011 Sub-national- based household interim projections Table 420 (Crown copyright, released April 2013)

- 6.3 The Council's Annual Monitoring Report in 2014 stated that the average household size between 2011 and 2021 is anticipated to fall for Hertfordshire and England as a whole. This is mostly a result of the increasing number of one person and lone parent households. These are the two groups most disadvantaged by the current housing market.
- 6.4 Average house prices in the Dacorum towns are, for most house types, higher than the averages for Hertfordshire. This makes it difficult for new entrants to the housing market, particularly young people seeking to become homeowners, as shown in the table below.

	Detached	Semi-detached	Terraced	Flats Maisonettes	Average
Berkhamsted	£882,700	£497,000	£456,000	£229,300	£489,400
Hemel Hempstead	£485,400	£323,500	£262,900	£165,200	£277,300
Tring	£541,000	£452,700	£350,300	£275,500	£352,100
Hertfordshire	£531,986	£302,217	£227,495	£165,551	£262,305

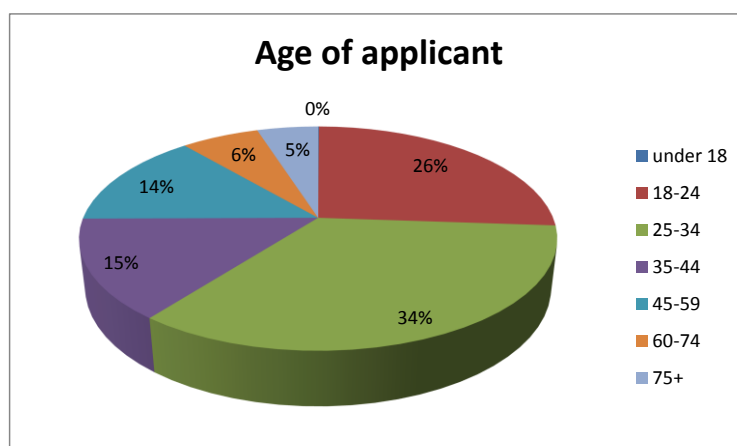
(Sources: Data produced by Land Registry © Crown copyright 2014; and Rightmove, <http://www.rightmove.co.uk/house-prices.html> (October 2014))

The percentage of 16 to 24 year olds who are homeowners in England has gone down significantly since 1991 as shown below.



(Sources: English Housing Survey (EHS) 2012 to 2013, Table FC2101, DCLG ; EHS 2001/02, Table S106, DCLG)

6.5 In November 2014 there was a full review of the Council's housing register and Housing Allocations Policy. The Council's housing register had 4772 active applicants. The housing register broken down into age categories is shown below.

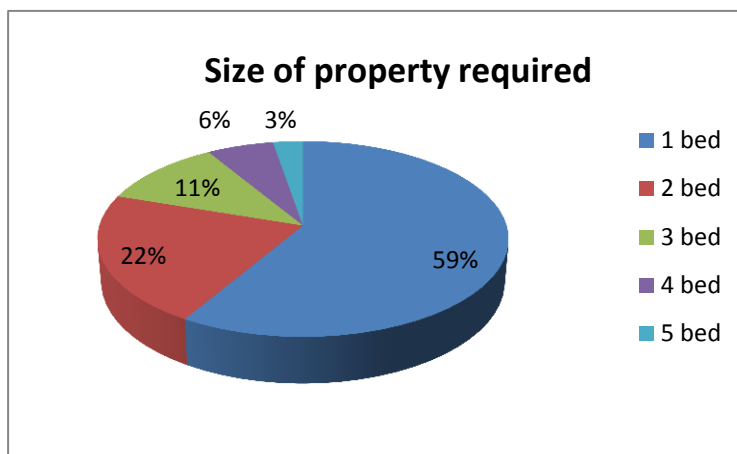


Younger age groups were found to be disproportionately represented on the active housing register when compared to the population data from the 2011 census.

- 2863 (60%) of the housing register were between 18 and 34
- 3579 (75%) of the housing register were between 18 and 44

26% of the 18 – 24 population in the borough (based on Census 2011) were on the active housing register, and therefore in some form of housing need. Around 20% of this group had never placed a bid, although it is not clear why this may be.

59% of the housing register had a one-bed need (see the figure below). Applicants over 60 only made up 11% of this, and therefore over 40% of the register was made up of under 60s seeking one-bed accommodation.



The Council has a much smaller number and turnover of general needs one-bed properties than it does sheltered one-bed properties. From November 2013 to November 2014 196 allocations of one-bed accommodation were made, of which 109 were to sheltered housing.

Although over-60s make up only a relatively small proportion of the housing register (11% of applicants in November 2014), they receive a high proportion of all allocations made (41% of all allocations were made into sheltered housing between November 2013 and November 2014).

6.6 Presentations made to the Council by people who are homeless or threatened with homelessness are dominated by the younger age groups as can be seen by the data from April 2014 – March 2015 below.

Age group	Number of homeless applications	Percentage of homeless applications (%)
Under 25	69	25
25 – 34	84	30
35 – 44	70	25
45 - 54	41	15
55 - 64	12	4
65 and over	3	1
Total	279	
Total 16 – 34	153	55
Total 16 – 44	223	80

The numbers of full statutory homeless duties awarded by the Council to people who are homeless or threatened with homelessness, are correspondingly dominated by the younger age groups, shown by the equivalent available data from April 2014 – March 2015 below.

Age group	Number of full homeless duties awarded	Percentage of full homeless duties awarded (%)
Under 25	64	33
25 – 44	101	53
45 – 59	24	12.5
60 – 64	1	0.5
65 – 74	2	1
75+	0	0
Total	192	
Total 16 – 44	165	86

Homeless households under 25 are the group most likely to be found to be unintentionally homeless (i.e. to have not caused their homelessness) and therefore receive the full homeless duty, as shown below. This could suggest that this youngest age group are the most vulnerable to triggers that result in homelessness that they do not have any control over.

Age group	Percentage of homeless presentations given full homeless duty
Under 25	93
25 – 44	66
45 – 64	47
65 and over	67

6.7 Of those households that received the full homeless duty, the priority need category 'with dependent children' was the most common (77%). Of those 77% the breakdown of numbers of children in the family are shown below. Over half are families with only one child, and it could be speculated that a first child may be a trigger contributing to homelessness.

Household size in terms of numbers of children for those households given a full duty with the priority need category 'with dependent children'	Percentage (%)
1 child	51
2 children	32
3 children	17

6.8 The Council's partners are seeing similar trends in the local homeless population. Since its opening in May 2015, The Elms hostel resident population has been dominated by younger residents. The breakdown of residents to by age from May 2015 to the end August 2015 is shown below.

Age group	Number of residents	Percentage
18-25	28	42
26-40	25	38
41-59	12	18
60+	1	2
Total	66	100

6.9 The proportions of tenants in rent arrears in the Council's tenant population, when contrasted with the whole tenant population, show that the younger age groups are disproportionately represented. In addition, looking at the percentage of each age group in arrears shows that younger age groups are more likely to be in arrears.

Age	Percentage of whole tenant population	Percentage of tenant population in arrears	Percentage of age group in arrears
0 – 25	2.74	4.98	70
26 – 40	19.8	31.21	60.77
41 – 50	17.45	24.36	53.84
51 – 65	27.71	26.44	36.79
66 and over	31.87	13.01	15.74

6.10 Satisfaction data from the Council's STAR survey (age breakdown data shown below from the 2012 survey) shows a consistent picture of much greater dissatisfaction with council services among younger tenants.

How satisfied or dissatisfied are you with the overall quality of your home?

Age	Number of general needs tenant responses	Very satisfied	Fairly satisfied	Neither satisfied or dissatisfied	Fairly dissatisfied	Very dissatisfied
25 or under	109	13	28	17	25	17
26 - 39	478	11	49	13	19	9
40 – 54	860	17	52	9	15	7
55 – 74	1091	28	55	6	8	3
57 or over	601	48	46	2	3	1

Generally, how satisfied or dissatisfied are you with the way Dacorum Borough Council as your housing landlord deals with repairs and maintenance?

Age	Number of general needs tenant responses	Very satisfied	Fairly satisfied	Neither satisfied or dissatisfied	Fairly dissatisfied	Very dissatisfied
25 or under	109	17	29	20	17	17
26 - 39	478	19	43	13	16	9
40 – 54	860	23	44	10	14	9
55 – 74	1091	36	46	6	8	4
57 or over	601	53	39	2	4	2

How satisfied or dissatisfied are you that Dacorum Borough Council as your housing landlord listens to your views and acts upon them?

Age	Number of general needs tenant responses	Very satisfied	Fairly satisfied	Neither satisfied or dissatisfied	Fairly dissatisfied	Very dissatisfied
25 or under	109	9	28	28	19	16
26 - 39	478	10	34	35	14	7
40 – 54	860	13	37	29	15	6
55 – 74	1091	19	45	24	8	4
57 or over	601	32	48	13	4	2

How satisfied or dissatisfied are you with the way Dacorum Borough Council as your housing landlord deals with the following? - complaints

Age	Number of general needs tenant responses	Very satisfied	Fairly satisfied	Neither satisfied or dissatisfied	Fairly dissatisfied	Very dissatisfied
25 or under	109	14	34	30	12	10
26 - 39	478	12	39	35	8	5
40 – 54	860	17	40	30	9	5
55 – 74	1091	21	46	23	8	3
57 or over	601	33	44	17	4	1

7. The objectives

7.1 To drive forward change and improvements this Young Persons' Housing Strategy sets out four key strategic objectives.

Our key strategic objectives

The Council and its partners will:

- Be able to respond to a young person's needs to achieve a positive housing pathway
- Have an approach to tenancy sustainment that reflects challenges specific to young people
- Have an effective communications plan that engages young people
- Understand the data and information we have and need in order to make informed decisions about shaping the service to meet the needs of young people

KEY OBJECTIVE 1

To be able to respond to a young person's needs to achieve a positive housing pathway

To meet Key Objective 1 this strategy commits to:

1) Being an active partner in the Joint Housing Protocol (JHP) for 16 and 17 year olds

The JHP sets out the terms for multi-agency cooperation when dealing with a 16 or 17 year old who is homeless or threatened with homelessness to ensure the best outcomes for the young person. This is linked to the 'Joint Front Door' approach that the Council has committed to with HCC Targeted Youth Support and Herts Young Homeless. The Council's Homelessness Strategy 2013 – 2018 sets out more detail about this commitment.

2) Providing more training to officers that will enable the service to better prevent a young person or young family from becoming homeless by working with:

- **families experiencing disputes (only when the family home is considered a safe place); and**
- **private landlords and young tenant households experiencing tenancy difficulties.**

Being evicted from accommodation and going through the experience of becoming homeless is very stressful, especially for young people who may have limited independent living skills, have very young children, have complex relationships with family and friends, and be in and out of education or work. Time spent in temporary accommodation may be quite long and involve one or more moves. Young people can find themselves isolated from support networks and faced with additional costs of living. Avoiding this scenario in the housing pathway of a young person or young family is a priority for the Council.

The Council's Housing Advice and Options Officers, who carry out homeless investigations, provide the Council's frontline prevention service. By undergoing training on issues specific to young people and families these officers may be able to provide practical support to prevent homelessness and develop a housing pathway that starts from the premise of avoiding crisis by maintaining the current accommodation (when it is considered to be safe), at least until further secure accommodation arrangements can be made.

At the point that the Council becomes aware of a young person or young family experiencing family disputes and struggling to remain in the family home (from a housing register application or presentation as threatened with homelessness), the Council can help by trying to identify the issues that are causing difficulty between individuals and offer suggestions for resolution. For example, training officers to give practical support to help multi-generational households manage after the birth of a new baby could help some young people and their families deal with the challenges this situation presents.

The costs associated with a new child could be a trigger for young families running into arrears in the private rented sector. Training officers in how to support households to budget specifically for a new baby could help households to manage this situation. The Council can use its position as a third party to liaise with landlords and set up repayment agreements where arrears may have built up.

Once current accommodation has been stabilised the Council can then work with the young person or young family to plan a pathway to the long-term housing situation they are seeking.

3) Making sure that those young people who do need temporary accommodation have an experience that seeks to minimise causes of stress

The majority of homeless applicants, and therefore the Council's population in temporary accommodation, are in the younger age groups, and they often have young children. The Council has a range of temporary accommodation options, however when most or all of these are full, the initial options available for a newly homeless household may be very limited. The Council recognises that it could do more to communicate to young people the need to contact the Council as soon as they know they may be threatened with homelessness. Officers can then better plan the placements of homeless households with different make-ups and vulnerabilities. It is when the Council has little time to plan, that placements into unsuitable accommodation have to be made, which is worst with on-the-day presentations. A plan to communicate and educate around this message, across the borough, may help to prevent young people deciding to present as homeless very close to the event. The Council has also introduced new 'crash pad' spaces to be available for people homeless in an emergency and to try and eliminate the need to place people in bed and breakfast.

The Council has received feedback from its partners who work with women fleeing domestic violence that the option of going into a refuge is not always what the individual wants, and that an offer of refuge accommodation should not be the only offer of temporary accommodation to women in this position. This has been most common in the cases of younger women wanting to remain in the local area to continue to receive support from family and friends. In response to this, the Council will ensure that the offer of a refuge place is not the only offer made to these women if they do not want that option. The Council will respect their choice to decide to take other accommodation, so long as there is not conflicting police or Multi Agency Risk Assessment Conference (MARAC) advice not to.

The Council has identified that the decision-making process involved in temporary accommodation placements can lead to very different accommodation and outcomes for people. Due to the relatively short time that younger people have been of working age, and that they are often juggling young families, they may be more likely to be in non-permanent work arrangements that get easily disrupted by being moved into temporary accommodation. The Council is committed to taking this into account (along with numerous other household priorities) when making temporary accommodation placements. The competing priorities for placements will be further explored by the Council in a Temporary Accommodation Strategy to be developed in 2016.

4) Having strong partnerships that enable the Council to have clear referral routes into available housing options for young people

Housing options specifically for single 18 – 25s, or for mothers and babies, are a necessary housing step for some young people not ready to manage their own tenancy and with no option to be housed by family or friends. The Council's partners also offer outreach services that can support individuals who are in their own independent accommodation.

The Council needs a strong relationship with its partners so that officers can be kept up-to-date on:

- levels of service being provided
- current occupancy levels
- the length of any waiting lists

Officers need to be able to make referrals to these services in an informed way and be able to communicate to the individuals they are working with what the different services and accommodation involve.

The Council has been carrying out work with its partners to strengthen these flows of information, and a Housing Partnerships Strategy is due to be developed in 2016.

5) Trialling a change of use of some of those council properties that attract lower demand in order to better meet the needs of younger people

The Council has far less demand for its four, five and six bedroom properties than for one bedroom properties. The Council is therefore committed to trialling letting larger properties as houses of multiple occupation (HMO), with tenancies to each room and shared facilities available. The Council can look to its partners such as DENS RentAid for models of this, and would explore commissioning options so that another provider with expertise could provide the support required. If this trial is successful this could then be further expanded. This accommodation would then receive support to assist successful shared living.

In addition to this, The Council has a large sheltered housing stock, and among this stock are some schemes that are very high in demand as well as some which have lower demand due to their location or suitability of rooms and facilities for older people. The Council will commit to an options appraisal that explores the possibility of trialling the conversion of one of its lower demand sheltered housing schemes, and convert this to young person's housing with a supporting officer available during working hours (this may be implemented as temporary accommodation model of provision).

Two bedroom properties are in greater demand for three bedroom properties. Three bedroom properties can therefore be let to people with a relatively low housing need compared to those being successful in bidding for two beds. The Council believes that opening up bidding on some three bedroom properties to people with a two bed need is a necessary step to more fairly meeting the housing need in the borough. The Council is committed to a piece of work early in 2016 to propose amendments to the Housing Allocations Policy, which will cover:

- Prioritising those families that are close to being overcrowded; and
- Avoiding allocations to people who will be negatively affected by the spare room benefit restrictions.

KEY OBJECTIVE 2

To have an approach to tenancy sustainment that reflects challenges specific to young people

To meet Key Objective 2 this strategy commits to:

1) Having an income collection procedure that recognises challenges specific to young people under 25

The Council is reviewing its income collection procedures in 2015/16 with an intention to make steps to identify different 'segments' of the tenant population that will correspond to additional steps to be taken as part of the income collection procedure. In this way resources can be focused to groups most in need of support. Depending on the make-up of a household, differences in procedure could include:

- Pre-tenancy training and support given while on the housing register;
- Back-to-work-signposting; and
- Intensive support at the start of a tenancy for people who have not held tenancies before, or who are seeing significant changes to household budgets as a result of moving to a larger property.

Around 70 percent of tenants under 25 are in arrears, and this may then be a cycle that repeats throughout their lives. If these tenants can be supported intensively in the first few months to get into a good routine of prioritising and making rent payments, then the Council may be able to prevent some households experiencing lengthy struggles with arrears.

While in temporary accommodation homeless applicants have to pay a licence fee. Over 90% of applicants under 25 receive the full duty and so many will move into council homes. Homeless applicants have to have a clear licence account in order to be housed, however this may mask that payments during a temporary accommodation stay have been erratic and difficult for officers to manage. Getting good payment habits in place during temporary accommodation stays, and recognising where households need additional support, has to be a priority for the Council.

2) Training officers to provide tailored tenancy sustainment support to:

- **Young single people and couples**
- **Young families**

At the moment the Council's Tenancy Sustainment team has officers specially trained in financial support, debt management and budgeting, property surveying, domestic violence, mental health, and other issues including hoarding. Providing officers with training specific to supporting young people and families will add to this offer in terms of the intensive support to tenants that the Council can provide.

The Council will also explore the possibility of having a dedicated officer resource to focus on young people and families. This officer would then be able to have the appropriate links to HCC 'Families First'.

3) Develop the pre-tenancy training offer and plan to offer in-the-community 'life-skills' sessions and 'property maintenance' sessions

People on the Council's housing register are currently invited to complete pre-tenancy training that will give them five additional points that improve their chances of being successful for an offer of housing. The five points are currently added immediately after someone has attended. The housing service is committed to introducing an online assessment to be completed by an attendee after the session in order to reinforce key messages. The Council will develop different versions of the assessment so that it can target messages to particular groups, including one for under 25s or people who have never had their own tenancy before. The five points will then only be added once this assessment is complete and a score of a set percentage has been achieved.

As well as delivering the pre-tenancy training, the Council is committed to training its Tenancy Sustainment Officers and Welfare, Support and Education Officers to plan and facilitate 'life-skills' and 'property maintenance' sessions to deliver to individuals, households or groups. These sessions will be part of a package focusing on support for younger people, whether they are:

- Households in temporary accommodation struggling to manage in either self-contained or shared accommodation; or
- Households who have become council tenants who are not fully equipped with the basic skills to manage their own tenancy.

Group sessions have the added benefit of potentially allowing young tenants to meet new peers who can become part of their support network. The Council recognises that forming a supportive peer network in itself can contribute to young people having more successful tenancies.

4) Developing a back to work pathway that recognises the specific challenges facing young people

The minimum wage for young people under 21 is less than that for people 21 and over. In addition, young people have less years of work experience, and typically are on lower salaries than those further on in their careers. There is an increasing trend of employment contracts that do not offer guaranteed hours each week, and of self-employment with monthly fluxes in income. Employment has many benefits for individuals and households, and the Council is committed to developing its ability to support people onto a back-to-work pathway.

The Council is committed to developing its relationship with Job Centre Plus and the local Southill Centre (run by a charity) to link in to existing back-to-work pathways in the borough.

KEY OBJECTIVE 3

Have an effective digitalisation and communications plan that engages young people

To meet Key Objective 3 this strategy commits to:

1) Digitalisation of information and services

All demographic groups of residents in Dacorum, and younger people in particular, are now increasingly looking to the internet for sources of information and access to services.

Younger people are more likely to experience homelessness and to experience difficulties sustaining a tenancy. The Council believes that management of its website so that younger people (as well as all housing register applicants and the general tenant population) receive clear and current messages about housing options and tenancy conditions, could contribute to supporting positive behaviours. Content management and forward planning of content for the Council's website is therefore very important, and the housing service is committed to dedicating an officer resource to ensuring that all its communications content is up-to-date and that service messages go out in a planned way.

The service transaction pages of the website (e.g. the rent payment page and the housing register login) receive the greatest 'footfall' (in contrast to 'information only' pages) and so the placement of targeted messages onto these webpages will help maximise the number of younger people that key messages reach.

The majority of services people interact with are now digital-by-default (applications to jobs, banking and facilities statements, central government services, satisfaction surveying, etc). As a result, many younger people are unlikely to make reference to leaflets or hardcopies of manuals etc., which people are choosing not to store/file in the long-term. The Council's 'Tenants Handbook' has recently been provided to all new tenants as a hardcopy booklet style document. This has high printing costs and if any section changes then the whole document becomes out of date. The Council recognises that often when people want to seek out information relating to their tenancy they will look online. The Council is committed to consulting with tenants across all demographics to find out how it can better provide the 'Tenant Handbook' information so that it is easy to access, while also being easy to update.

2) Text messaging and mobile technology

Younger people are making use of mobile technology and a high proportion now have smart phones with access to the internet. The easier online transactions become, the more likely younger people are to use them.

The Council is exploring a number of digital solutions, for example, the ability to text message people who have missed rent payments with a link direct to the online payment page. An additional benefit to this in terms of the Council's income collection procedure, is that while someone may choose not to open a letter if they want to avoid confronting the contents, an email or text message may be more likely to be read.

3) Communications from the housing register onwards

People on the Council's housing register can be categorised into two groups:

- Applicants who are not current council tenants; and
- Current council tenants seeking a transfer.

Both groups above can find that a move will trigger financial and tenancy sustainment difficulties because, either:

- They are taking on a tenancy for the first time and have no previous experience of managing rent, bills, council tax, etc; or
- They are taking on a larger property and as a result will have to pay more in rent, bills, council tax, etc.

While people are on the housing register the Council has an opportunity to communicate on a range of tenancy sustainment topics, including paying rent. Nearly all housing register applicants provide the Council with email addresses that could be used to make contact.

4) Making use of social media to deliver a communications plan that targets younger people

The Council's housing service has recently been making use of a Facebook page as a communications tool. However, the use of the page has not been developed as part of a broader communications plan, and the content has for the most part related to tenants and leaseholders, rather than those people who may be on the Council's housing register seeking to be housed.

The Council is committed to promoting a clear communications brand around its whole housing service (providing housing advice, preventing and managing homelessness, a private sector scheme, housing people in council homes and supporting people to sustain those tenancies, providing a quality repairs and maintenance service, managing the housing register and helping existing tenants to transfer if their housing needs change). It is hoped that this will help young people in particular to understand the bigger picture of housing in Dacorum and what services and housing options are available to them.

Social media is a good tool for creating brands and generating interest around a topic. The Council is committed to a creative new branding of its use of social media, with a quality forward plan of messages going out.

KEY OBJECTIVE 4

To understand the data and information we have and need in order to make informed decisions about shaping the service to meet the needs of young people

To meet Key Objective 4 this strategy commits to:

1) Improving our ability to build data reports from the systems and databases used by the housing service

This strategy has demonstrated the power of data to highlight differences between groups in terms of their experiences of the Council's housing service. As age has been found to be such an important determinant in households' success in sustaining tenancies and avoiding homelessness, the Council is committed to making sure it is getting the maximum in terms of relevant data out of the three main databases in use across the service (Orchard, Abrisas and SPriNT).

Building useful, informative data reports requires an understanding of:

- The data in a system;
- What we want to know; and
- How to correctly place fields within a report builder to get the data in the format required.

The Council's housing service uses its reporting capabilities to get data in order to:

- Produce data for performance indicators and benchmarking; and
- Inform strategies and service development.

The Council has an in-house expert for its housing management database (Orchard), who is able to use 'Web Intelligence' to provide reports.

At the moment, the other systems (the housing register and homelessness database (Abrisas), and the support plan database (Sprint)) have a number of officers across the housing service who have some involvement in creating reports.

However, there are limitations in terms of officer expertise, as other than for Orchard, no officers are using the report builders with a high frequency as part of their day-to-day role. In addition, no officer is combining information from across the different databases on a regular basis.

The Council recognises a need to increase officer training on reports, and to develop a role, or roles, within the service that have responsibility for building a high-level picture of what data across all the systems tells us.

2) Increasing the quality and quantity of customer profiling data held on the Council's tenant population

The Council has a relatively high percentage of age and ethnicity data relating to its tenants (over 90 and 70 percent respectively). However, in order to better understand its tenant population, and particularly the challenges facing its younger population, the Council recognises that there is a need to hold more data that will identify:

- Household makeup including children;
- Employment status and income; and
- Key vulnerabilities that are indicative of increased support needs.

The Council recognises the business case for investing in a customer profiling project in order to improve the customer profiling data held on its tenant population. The Council is committed to running a discrete project in 2016/17 and then having a plan in place to ensure continued updates to tenant data.

In the long-term the Council wants to be able to provide a service that successfully meets the needs of its younger tenants and in order to achieve this it needs to know:

- Where younger tenants are living within the stock;
- Whether any areas or property types correlate with arrears or other vulnerabilities; and
- What types of household make-up exist and whether any correlate with arrears or other vulnerabilities.

3) Improving the understanding of young people's experiences of the Council's repairs and maintenance service

The Council's contractor Osborne is working with the Tenant Involvement team to plan a 'customer journey' consultation exercise with tenants. The purpose will be to get answers from tenants to the question 'what are you thinking when ...' in relation to different stages of the various repairs and maintenance processes.

As younger people have reported lower satisfaction levels about the Council's services and the quality of their homes, this is an opportunity to try and understand this further. With a greater insight into the reasons for lower satisfaction the Council and Osborne can then review how services could be shaped to address this.