

Dacorum Borough Council – evidence base for homelessness and rough sleeping review

Consultation draft

This draft document has been prepared by HQN to be shared with partners and customers as part of our consultation on the new homelessness and rough sleeping strategy. It includes the evidence base from which the new proposed strategy is drawn.

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1. Geography and county-wide working

Dacorum BC covers the western area of Hertfordshire County. The main town is Hemel Hempstead. Despite its close proximity to London, 85% of the area is rural, with 60% being in the Green Belt.

There is county-wide working on issues relating to homelessness and rough sleeping. Housing related support services are commissioned by Herts County Council on a county-wide basis; new contracts are being commissioned in 2020. There is a county-wide Herts Head of Housing meeting to discuss strategic issues; team leaders also have a county-wide meeting to discuss more operational issues.

2. Corporate context

2.1 Awards

The council has won a number of awards for housing and related services including:

- National Practitioner Support Service Gold award for homelessness services
- Centre for Housing Support 3 star excellence standard
- TPAS Pro landlord accreditation
- ISO 9000:2015 quality management standards

2.2 Corporate Plan

The Corporate Plan runs from 2015 to 2020 and includes commitments to:

- Deliver a £30m regeneration of the Hemel Hempstead town centre
- An economic development strategy with one of the lowest unemployment rates in the UK
- Work with the Hertfordshire Enterprise Partnership to deliver a local Enterprise zone bringing jobs and essential infrastructure
- Work with partners to reduce crime and the fear of crime
- Build 300 new affordable homes and continue to invest in the council's housing stock
- Deliver services through a mix of voluntary, private and public sector partners
- Deliver innovation and value for money

Other targets include:

- Tackling anti-social behaviour
- Encouraging the use of green energy
- Increasing levels of digital inclusion and on-line literacy
- Ensuring residents are involved in the design and delivery of services
- Supporting an additional 500 new affordable homes through developer agreements and RPs
- Deliver 2,000 new homes on the open market

There are also specific targets to reduce homelessness in the Corporate Plan:

- Provide help and support to those who are homeless or at risk of becoming homeless
- Support residents to access good quality and affordable homes in the private rented sector
- Continue to focus on preventing homelessness through proactive advice and assistance
- Increase the availability of temporary and permanent accommodation
- Use B&B accommodation in emergencies only

2.3 Housing strategy

A new housing strategy was adopted in 2018, for the period up to 2021. The strategy highlights some key challenges for Dacorum, including:

- Significant predicted increase in the number of older people (65+)
- Increasing difficulty for those on benefits to afford private sector rents, with benefit rates falling some 15 – 25% below private rent levels; a high proportion of those who are homeless come from the private rented sector

The strategy includes:

- A focus on developing a private rented sector which offers a safe and accessible housing option
- Ensuring that services take into account the different and varying needs of local people

The key priorities and actions are:

- Work in partnership to meet the demand for quality affordable housing
 - Implementing a new housing development strategy
 - More effective joint working with local housing associations
 - Redevelop under-used garage sites for new homes for social rent
 - Closer working with planning colleagues to maximise delivery through S106
- Proactively and effectively tackle poor conditions in private sector housing
 - Develop a Private Sector Housing Strategy
 - Work with landlords to identify and appropriately license all HMOs
 - Explore the option of developing a local lettings agency
 - Review approach to tenancy sustainment in private sector
- Understand our housing stock and use it to provide right homes to meet need
 - Drive forward asset management strategy
 - Carry out stock condition survey
 - Manage balance between under-occupation and overcrowding
 - Make smarter choices in how we manage disabled adaptations
- Support and empower our Council tenants
 - Implement new sustainable tenancies strategy
 - Develop robust approach to tenancy audits
 - Design target approaches for those most at risk of loneliness
 - Develop a new tenant involvement strategy

3. Current strategy for preventing and tackling homelessness and rough sleeping

The current strategy runs from 2016 to 2020 and has already been updated in 2019. The strategy highlights the impact of Welfare Reform and Universal Credit, and the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017. The strategy is based around five key commitments, with identified actions as follows:

- Continue to build partnerships across different sectors and lead Dacorum's response to preventing and tackling homelessness
 - Increase the effectiveness of the homelessness forum
 - Offer holistic support by improving pathways between services
 - Review agreements between housing services and external organisations
 - Lead a borough-wide response to any national changes
 - Have a communication plan to ensure that partners and residents are aware of our response to homelessness

- Use our travel assistance to fund reconnection for clients with their local area
- Work together with partners and residents to understand the causes of homelessness and increase the help Dacorum services can offer
 - Use customer insight to map services against need
 - Develop a Housing First model for those with complex needs
 - Eradicate rough sleeping through a No Second Night Out model
 - Identify potential victims of domestic abuse and those with mental health problems to enable earlier intervention and prevention of homelessness
 - Support grass roots organisations to set up initiatives to tackle the causes of homelessness
- Improve access, security and stability within the private rented sector and allow Dacorum residents to remain in their homes
 - Improve access to information on housing rights
 - Work with private sector landlords to enable tenants to remain in their homes
 - Develop a scheme allowing people to access private rented sector
 - Increase support for mortgage repossession prevention
- Empower Dacorum residents to make decisions about their housing options
 - Easy access to housing options information
 - Improve Enhanced Housing Options toolkit and on-line information
 - Improve contact channels
 - Increase access to housing and options advice through outreach and pop-ups
- Reduce the effect of homelessness on young people and their families
 - Increase referrals to mediation services
 - Reduce use of B&B for young people and families with children
 - Offer workshops on life skills and housing eligibility for young people
 - Ensure children and young people have access to appropriate support following their experience of homelessness

4. Data analysis

In order to capture data on homelessness prevention and relief, MHCLG introduced a new monitoring system from April 2018, H-CLIC. This means that it is not possible to fully compare data from previous years with data collected post the introduction of the HRA.

The information below focuses on the period since the introduction of H-CLIC although some historic data (P1E data) has also been included to provide longer term trends.

4.1 Reason for approach

The tables below give the reasons for clients approaching the service, broken down by year. This shows the main reasons why people become at risk of homelessness, which are consistent across the last 20 months.

Table 1 – reasons why people become homeless (all approaches)

Reason	Number 2018	Number 2019 YTD
Family no longer willing to accommodate	221	119
End of AST	219	113
Other	115	59
Relationship with partner ended (non-violent breakdown)	82	53
Domestic Abuse	59	61
Friends no longer willing to accommodate	25	25
End of Social rented	30	23
Eviction from supported housing	18	19
Non-racially motivated / other motivated violence or harassment	14	13
End of private tenancy – not AST	11	13
Left institution with no accommodation available	6	6
Mortgage repossession	3	4
Disrepair	2	1
Fire/flood/emergency	2	3
Racially motivated violence or harassment	1	1
Left HM forces	0	2
Total	858	671

Source: DBC

If the number of approaches continues at the same level for the remainder of the year, the service will be dealing with 895 cases in total, a small increase on 2018.

It is noticeable that there have been more approaches due to Domestic Abuse in the year to date than there were for the whole of the previous year.

4.2 Duty owed

Table 2 – households assessed and duty owed (2018/19)

	Dacorum	%age	England	%age
Threatened with homelessness – prevention duty owed	358	53	145,020	51
Homeless – relief duty owed	287	42	118,700	41
Not threatened with homelessness within 56 days	33	5	22,700	8
Total number of assessments	678	-	286,410	-
Total number where duty owed	645	95	263,720	92

Source: MHCLG live tables. Percentage column calculated using total number of assessments

Table 2 shows that prevention is working for around half of all cases. Dacorum figures largely reflect the national pattern; Dacorum has a slightly higher percentage of successful prevention cases and a correspondingly slightly lower percentage of relief cases – but these figures are still considered experimental and minor variations may not be significant.

4.3 Current accommodation

Table 3 - Accommodation at time of application for those for whom a duty is owed (2018/9)

Private rented sector	160
Living with family	169
No fixed abode	155
Social rented	52
Living with friends	49
Homeless leaving an Institution	8
Rough sleeping	9
Owner occupier (including shared ownership)	3
Temporary accommodation	6
NASS	-
Refuge	14
Other	23

Source: MHCLG live tables.

Table 3 shows that those who had previously been living with their families were the largest single group approaching the service, closely followed by those living in the private rented sector. The next largest group were those with no fixed abode, followed by those living in social rented housing.

4.4 Household characteristics

Table 4 – type of household owed a duty (2018/19)

	Prevention duty	Relief duty	Total
Single parent with dependent children (male)	8	6	14
Single parent with dependent children (female)	96	53	149
Single adult (male)	77	110	187
Single adult (female)	84	87	171
Couple with dependent children	56	13	69
Couple/two adults no children	29	15	44
Three or more adults with dependent children	3	2	5
Three or more adults no children	3	1	4

Source: MHCLG live tables.

Table 4 shows that the predominant household types approaching the service were single men, single women and women single parents. Of these, homelessness was prevented for nearly two-thirds of women single parents, and half of single female

adults. Men fared slightly less well, with successful prevention for just over half of male single parents and around 40% of single men. Homelessness prevention was also successful for the majority of couples whether or not they had dependent children.

Table 5 – employment status of main adult owed a duty (2018/19)

Registered unemployed	48
Not working due to long term illness or disability	45
Working full-time	93
Working part-time	48
Not seeking work/at home	60
Not registered unemployed but seeking work	24
Retired	16
Student/training	1
Other	35
Not known	275

Source: MHCLG live tables.

Table 5 shows that a significant proportion of the main adults in households where a duty was owed are working either full-time or part-time. The number of households where the main adult is retired is relatively small but this may increase as the proportion of older adults in the general population increases.

Table 6 – age of main adult owed a duty (2018/19)

16/17	2
18 - 24	134
25 - 34	209
35 - 44	145
45 - 54	89
55 - 64	41
65 - 74	17
75+	8

Source: MHCLG live tables.

The age range indicated in Table 6 generally reflects national statistics. The numbers of older adults are higher than the number shown as retired in the previous table, perhaps reflecting the fact that many people now work beyond 65.

4.7 Prevention and relief duty outcomes

The tables below show outcomes from the new prevention and relief duties. Figures in tables 7 – 10 include all post-HRA cases.

Table 7 – accommodation outcomes for all prevention cases

Secured alternative accommodation for 12 or more months	68
Secured alternative accommodation for 6 months	34
Secured existing accommodation for 12 or more months	19
Secured existing accommodation for 6 or more months	47
Grand total	168

Source: DBC

Table 7 above shows that the majority of cases where homelessness is prevented are through securing alternative accommodation; however a significant minority of cases (almost 40%) are able to remain in their existing accommodation for 6 months or longer.

Table 8 – outcomes for all prevention cases

56 days or more expired and no further contact	11
Contact lost	85
Homeless	224
Intentionally homeless from accommodation provided	2
No longer eligible	2
Refused suitable accommodation	1
Secured alternative accommodation for 12 or more months	68
Secured alternative accommodation for 6 months	34
Secured existing accommodation for 12 or more months	19
Secured existing accommodation for 6 months	47
Withdrew application/applicant deceased	28
Reason not given	1047
Grand total	1568

Source: DBC

Table 8 shows outcomes for all prevention cases. The high number of cases where the reason is not given make it difficult to draw firm conclusions, although it is notable that only around 15% of cases go on to be considered as homeless.

Table 9 – accommodation outcomes for all relief cases

Secured accommodation for 12 months	96
Secured accommodation for 6 months	51
Grand total	147

Source: DBC

Tables 9 and 10 show outcomes for relief cases. DBC has been successful in securing accommodation for a minimum 12 months for the majority of cases. Table 10 below also shows a high number of cases where the reason is not given.

Table 10 – outcomes for all relief cases

56 days elapsed	231
Contact lost	123
Intentionally homeless from accommodation provided	2
Local connection referral accepted by another LA	2
No longer eligible	6
Notice served due to refusal to co-operate	1
Refused final accommodation or final part 6 offer	1
Secured accommodation for 12 or more months	96
Secured accommodation for 6 months	51
Withdrew application/applicant deceased	43
Reason not given	1012

Grand total	1568
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Source: DBC

4.8 Main duty outcomes

Table 11 - Main Duty Outcome

Homeless and no priority need	39
Homeless, priority need but intentional	11
Homeless, priority need, not intentional, S193(2) duty	184
Lost contact prior to assessment	5
Not eligible for assistance	1
Not homeless	2
Withdrew prior to assessment	3
Not stated	1323
Grand total	1568

Table 11 above shows the outcomes for all cases proceeding to a main duty, including consideration of priority need and intentionality.

4.9 P1E data for earlier years

As noted above, P1E data and H-CLIC data are not comparable, but the older P1E data does reveal longer-term trends. As can be seen in Table 12 below, the number of homelessness decisions made had reduced significantly between 2015/16 and 2017/18 whilst the percentage of those who were considered to be homeless, not intentionally so and in priority need increased. This suggests that homelessness prevention was working even before the new duties required under the HRA. The post-HRA figure of 645 households who were owed a duty is not fully comparable but does indicate the additional work which Dacorum is now having to carry out.

Table 12 - Homelessness decisions

	Total number decisions	Homeless and in priority need	Homeless and in priority need as %age of all decisions	Intentional	Not priority	Not homeless
2017/18	183	143	78%	14	12	14
2016/17	241	151	63%	20	47	23
2015/16	414	227	54%	40	91	56

Source: P1E data published on MHCLG live tables

4.10 Temporary accommodation

The tables below give a picture of how temporary accommodation (TA) is being used. Table 8 below gives the snapshot figure at the end of March for each year shown. As it is P1E data it only has figures to March 2018. It shows a small increase in numbers in TA over the three year period; this is prior to the HRA.

Table 13 - Households accommodated at end March

	Total	B&B	Hostels	LA/RP stock	PSL	Other
2018	91	-	22	31	-	32
2017	84	-	17	27	-	31
2016	81	-	14	40	-	22

Source: P1E data published on MHCLG live tables

Table 14 shows both the total number of households placed in B&B during each year, and the average number in TA at any one time. It also uses P1E data and shows a small year on year increase. Nationally the rise was much steeper, indicating that Dacorum have been able to manage demand for TA; it may also indicate that people are being moved on more quickly. Of particular note is the achievement of not using B&B style accommodation.

Table 14 – number of placements in TA

	Total number Of placements	Average number in TA at any time
2018/19	225	105
2017/18	188	78
2016/17	185	88

Since April 2019 226 households have been placed in temporary accommodation (figs at end October 2019.). If placements continue at a similar rate, this will be a significant increase on previous year figures. This is in line with our experience elsewhere, as a result of extended duties under the HRA.

The average number of nights in TA has been quite volatile, as shown in Table 15.

Table 15 – average number of nights in TA

	Average number of Nights spent in TA
2019/20 YTD	166 – 234*
2018/19	105
2017/18	146
2016/17	72 – 179*

*calculated on a monthly basis, lowest and highest averages given

DBC has recently carried out a review of TA and as a result are procuring a wider range of TA including some which will be suitable for those with more chaotic behaviour.

4.11 Support needs of applicants who are homeless/at risk of homelessness

Table 16 – Support needs of applicants

	2018 Sole support need	2018 More than one support need	2019 YTD Sole support need	2019 YTD More than one support need
Support need				

At risk of/experienced abuse – non DV	2	13	5	11
Mental health	105	216	63	187
Care leaver	6	8	2	9
18-25 requiring support to manage independently	8	21	7	20
Alcohol dependency	5	21	4	19
History of rough sleeping	1	24	0	2
Offending history	8	26	2	25
Learning disability	4	14	4	10
DV	38	67	33	92
Care leaver 21+	1	3	1	10
Sexual exploitation	6			10
Young parent requiring support	2	7	7	11
Drug dependency	1	20	0	19
Physical health	88	174	58	148
Old age	8	17	3	15
No support needs	412		194	
Help with education	1	2	0	3
16/17 year olds	3	5	5	11

Source: DBC

Table 16 shows that in 2018 around half of households who were homeless or at risk had a support need; the majority of these had more than one support need. In 2019 to date, almost three quarters of those approaching the service had a support need, again the majority had more than one support need.

There were high numbers of people needing support around mental health issues, both as a sole need and with other support needs. There were a surprisingly high number of people needing support with physical health, again the majority had more than one support need. Other high areas of need include support for domestic abuse issues, young people needing support to live independently, alcohol dependency, offending history and drug dependency.

5. Allocations policy and housing register

The allocations policy was reviewed in 2017 and a new policy adopted from April 2018. This gives highest priority to those needing to move for extreme/high medical or welfare needs, households on a flexible tenancy which is being brought to an end, and under-occupation (in social housing). Homeless households are awarded a relatively small number of points, making it harder to access social housing. However, some households may be given direct offers, including those for whom a sensitive letting is appropriate. This may include some Care Leavers and those moving on from supported housing.

Numbers on the housing register provide an indication of housing demand; they should not be interpreted as providing the whole picture on housing need. Some of those who would like to be on the register may be excluded/ineligible and numbers may also be constrained if households who feel they would face a long waiting time

choose not to apply. In common with many local authority allocation schemes, households have to satisfy local connection criteria which include having lived in the Borough for a minimum of 10 years (at any point during their lifetime) or have a close family connection who has lived in the Borough for at least 10 years or be working for at least 16 hours a week in permanent employment which has lasted at least 2 years. Local connection criteria are not applied in certain cases, including those leaving a refuge and those in the armed forces. Additional criteria may apply in certain circumstances, such as age restrictions on sheltered housing and additional local connection criteria in certain villages.

Households are not able to apply to the register where legal or other serious action has been taken against them in a previous tenancy.

In the period Oct 18 to Sept 19, 2271 applications for the register were received. 747 households were housed during the same period.

Table 17 – applicants on housing register

Applicant type	Active	Suspended	Total
Home seeker	4123	643	4766
Homeless (applicants in relief stage or duty accepted)	200	75	275
Transfer from registered provider	281	74	355
DBC transfer	8	6	14
Transfer current landlord not advised	1194	207	1401
Total	5806	1005	6811

Source: DBC

There is a very high number of transfers where the current landlord is unknown; this would benefit from further investigation but this is outside the remit of the homelessness review.

Table 18 – number of applicants suspended broken down into reasons for suspension.

Reason	Home seeker	Transfer	Homeless	Total
Applicants request	3	2	0	5
Awaiting documentation	136	20	3	159
Direct offer	22	37	8	67
Homeless investigation in progress	49	4	13	66
Intentionally homeless	1	0	2	3
Other	159	54	13	226
Rent arrears	25	41	1	67
Under offer	131	53	34	218
Care leaver – may be registered before they are 18 as pending move on at later stage	22	0	0	22
Medical assessment in progress	30	41	0	71
No recent contact	7	1	0	8
Offer refused	23	20	0	43
Under investigation	28	9	0	37
No reason selected	8	5	0	13
Total	644	287	74	1005

Source: DBC

Table 18 above looks at the reasons why applicants may be suspended from the list. The majority of suspended homeless applicants are already in receipt of an offer. A small number are suspended while the homeless investigation is in progress, and a similar number for other reasons. Given the low numbers, no further unpicking of these figures is required.

Table 19 –applicants on direct offer list

	EPD	1 bed	2 bed	3 bed	4 bed	5 bed	5+ bed	Total
Homeless duty acceptances	1	14	20	10	2	0	0	47
Adapted property	10	19	19	9	1	0	0	58
Panel decision	9	8	5	0	0	0	0	22
Total	20	41	44	19	3	0	0	127

Source: DBC

There is a significant number of applicants on the list for a direct offer – if we assume that all those being considered for a direct offer would be housed within a 12 month period, this would equate to 17% of lettings. However, the largest group are waiting for a suitable adapted property. Taking these out of the equation, direct lets would then account for less than 10% of lettings. Two-thirds of these would be to homeless households.

Table 20 below shows that those who are waiting for a direct offer of an adapted property tend to wait longer than households being considered for a direct offer because of homelessness or a panel decision. For homeless applicants, there are longer waiting times for 1 bed and 1 bed accommodation.

Table 20 – applicant /property type and dates of when the applicants who have waiting the longest were added to the direct offer list

	Homeless applicants	Adaptive need	Panel decision
EPD	18/07/2019	13/04/2017	13/06/2017
1 bed	20/11/2018	18/05/2015	01/08/2017
2 bed	23/03/2018	01/06/2017	28/06/2018
3 bed	28/02/2019	02/11/2015	
4 bed	29/05/2019	23/09/2019	
5 bed			

Source: DBC

Table 21 below gives bedroom size requirements for all those on the housing register. By far the greatest need is for 1 bed accommodation.

Table 21 – bedroom entitlements

	1 bed	2 bed	3 bed	4 bed	5 bed	6 bed	7 bed	Total
Active	3848	1291	538	104	18	7	0	5806
Suspended	554	295	124	21	9	1	1	1005
Total	4402	1586	662	125	27	8	1	6811

Source: DBC

Table 22 below shows stock availability by type and bedsize. There are more 3 bed homes than 1 or 2 beds. Generally, however, turnover on 1 bed properties is higher than on 2+ bed properties so the mismatch may not be as great as initially appears (*would be good to include bedsize breakdown of lettings if available*)

Table 22 – properties in DBC stock as of 30th September 2019. N.B. bedsits treated as flats

	House	Flat	Bungalow	Total
1 bed	65	2525	516	3106
2 bed	1584	1124	22	2730
3 bed	3706	176	0	3882
4 bed	427	0	0	427
5+	10	0	0	10
Totals	5792	3825	538	10155

Table 23 shows that there are over 1100 households on the register where one or more people are over 60. The majority of these require 1 bed accommodation.

Table 23 – housing register applicants where one of more household members are over 60

	1 bed need	2 bed need	3 bed need
Active	729	182	14
Suspended	171	24	9
Total	900	206	23

Table 24 below shows that over half of households including someone over 60 are not expressing a preference for older person's accommodation.

Table 24 – applicants who have stated their preference regarding sheltered accommodation

	CRM State
If you or your partner are 60 years of age or over, would you like older persons' accommodation	Active
No	130
Yes	106
Grand Total	236

Source: DBC

Table 25 shows sheltered housing stock levels. As might be expected, the vast majority are 1 bed flats.

Table 25 - Sheltered Housing stock levels (presume this is DBC only?)

Property type	Number in stock
One bed bungalow	173
Two bedroom bungalow	1
One bed flat	1301
Two bed flat	35
three bed flat	5
Three bed house	1
Total	1516

Source: DBC

With around 17% of households on the register including someone over the age of 60, there is scope for older persons accommodation to do more to meet housing need. Given the significant predicted increase in the number of older people in the Borough, sheltered housing could be an alternative for older people unable to remain in their existing accommodation. More work is needed to understand why sheltered housing is not a preferred option for so many and what can be done to align existing schemes with the needs and aspirations of older people.

This is further illustrated in Table 26 below which shows the number of times some sheltered properties have been advertised to attract a successful bid.

Table 26 – number of times sheltered properties advertised

Number of adverts	Number of properties
2	29
3	30
4	13
5	13
6	8
7	9
8	4
9	0
10 or more	6

Source: DBC

Table 27 – number of offer refusals broken down by financial year

	April 2015 – March 2016	April 2016 – March 2017	April 2017 – March 2018	April 2018- March 2019	April 2019 to date
Area unsafe	1	0	0	1	0
Area unsuitable	12	14	6	3	1
Bedroom too small	13	3	5	1	2
Change of circumstances	16	2	7	5	1
Did not respond to offer	2	2	4	0	2
Did not want to move	6	1	1	1	1
Property not affordable	3	2	8	2	2
Garden unsuitable	1	1	0	0	1
Health reasons	1	0	2	2	4
Landlord not prepared to accept	3	1	8	6	3
Neighbours	0	0	1	0	0
Offer withdrawn	16	12	13	17	8
Property too far from amenities	5	5	2	1	0
Property too far from family/friends	4	1	4	0	2
Property too far from schools	5	1	3	0	1
Property too large		1	0	0	
Property too small	8	7	19	10	4
Property unsuitable	34	3	5	3	6

Wrong floor level	3	2	1	0	1
Other	55	99	103	40	23
Unreasonable refusal	0	0	0	5	5
Cannot afford to move	0	1	2	0	1
Total refusals	188	158	194	97	68

Source: DBC

The housing register is closely managed; applicants will be removed if they are not bidding. As with most CBL schemes, refusal rates are relatively low – and appear to have halved over the past four years. There is no obvious pattern to refusals, though it is notable that around 16% of refusals in the year to date are down to landlords either withdrawing an offer or not being prepared to accept the successful applicant. DBC should continue to monitor this closely.

Tenancy sustainment was not raised as a significant issue in consultation. There is a pre-tenancy discussion with all successful applicants about expectations, which should help to promote sustainability. Pre-tenancy training is on offer with an additional 5 points awarded when completed. In consultation, there was some discussion about whether the training should be made mandatory, either for all applicants or targeted at those where circumstances suggest the tenancy may be more likely to fail.

Table 28 below may indicate that local lettings schemes may be preventing properties in villages from meeting the highest levels of housing need. There may be little that DBC can do to about this, as it is likely that the lettings criteria are built into S106 requirements for these properties.

Table 28 – showing points village properties let on and highest points level based on bids received

		Points let on to village connection	Highest level of points based on bids received
5	Boundary Cottages	31	78
43	Buckwood Road	25	60
22	Buckwood Road	30	45
48	Buckwood Road	25	100
5	Corner Wood	17	100
9	Cowper Road	34	100
27	Croft Close	27	93
6	Great Park	26	94
48	Hyde Meadows	41	43
27	Hyde Meadows	15	54
16	Kings Close	45	50
14	Kings Close	17	30
4	Mary Cross Close	15	110
6A	Meadow Way	41	43

49	Parkfield	27	94
32C	Parsons Close	17	100
32D	Parsons Close	20	95
7	Parsons Close	10	94
3C	Singlets Lane	33	100
11	Sursham Court	25	60

Source: DBC

6. Consultation

A workshop was held with key partners to review what is currently working well, where there are gaps, and what the priorities for the new strategy should be. The workshop was attended by over thirty people representing many different organisations in both the statutory and voluntary sectors. Some partners were unable to attend: there were no representatives present from mental health services, or probation and the Domestic Abuse co-ordinator was also unable to attend.

This draft of the evidence base is being issued as the second stage of consultation before the new strategy is signed off by Members.

Consultation will also take place with customers during this period.

7. Current prevention services, gaps and challenges

7.1 Low/medium support needs

There is a wide range of services in place for those with low to medium support needs, with good partnership working, including sign-posting and referrals to other services. During the workshop it was acknowledged that cuts to other services have resulted in higher thresholds for accessing support, which can mean that those with low/medium needs are not given priority. Actions identified included:

- Ensuring all partners have access to information about other services to facilitate sign-posting and referrals
- Investigating role of community navigators who can help with sign-posting and giving people initial support to access services

7.2 Mental health

There is a range of services in place, including statutory and voluntary sector services. Again, it was felt that cuts to existing services and increased thresholds mean that many who need help are unable to access it. A key gap is services for those with a dual diagnosis/complex needs.

There is a DBC mental health working group looking to tackle this issue; this already has representation from homelessness team.

Key actions include:

- Influencing commissioning organisations (eg Herts County Council and local CCG) to focus on earlier intervention to prevent those with a mental health issue reaching crisis point

- Investigating options for a central healthy hub which can promote awareness of services and sign-post/refer as appropriate

7.3 Complex needs

This is a significant issue for the homelessness prevention service – the majority of clients have complex needs.

Services in place to meet complex needs are good, but many clients have difficulty accessing them. This may be to do with services being at capacity, or it may be that the client's needs are considered 'too high' for some services. There is rough sleeper funding for a community drug and alcohol officer but they have had difficulty recruiting to the post. CCG are running a project with 4 CGL nurses in A&E who can also work with people at home or in a small unit

Key actions include:

- Influencing review of support services to ensure appropriate provision for those with the highest support needs
- Investigating sources of accommodation for those with a high support need who cannot live in general needs accommodation (including temporary accommodation)
- Ensuring all agencies are aware of the Duty to Refer and using it at the earliest possible stage
- Review and clarify the pathway for people with complex needs
- Develop more awareness amongst all partners of the services available, criteria and how to access
- Investigate role of community navigators in supporting households to access services; review opportunities to create flexible provision to offer tailored support to households where other services are unable to meet the need

7.4 Rough Sleepers

There is a range of services to help prevent people having to sleep rough, and to get them off the streets as quickly as possible. Prevention services includes work with prisons. Moving people off the streets includes outreach work and street pastoring. A range of statutory and voluntary sector agencies are involved. The Council is piloting a Housing First approach with an RP.

Some of the challenges include helping those without recourse to public funds, people whose past behaviour impact on their ability to access housing and other services, and cuts in other services which lead to people falling through the net.

Actions include:

- Investigating funding and other resources to create more supported accommodation with outreach and associated services

7.5 Young people

DBC invests significant resources in education and training for young people; this is helping to prevent and tackle homelessness amongst this group. For young people asked to leave, there is a mediation service. DBC use a formal 'offer to resolve' – in effect a letter to the family asking them to keep the YP for a period of time while an alternative solution is found. Staff are more confident about challenging families where it appears eviction is being used to increase priority for housing.

There is a specific issue around Looked After children and the gap between ages 18 and 25.

There is a local hostel which provides good support for young people plus other services. There is good communication between organisations and a multi-agency referral form is in place. It was noted that some young people may need longer-term support that is currently available, to help prevent future homelessness.

A key challenge is resourcing these services – not just funding but also recruiting and retaining staff with the appropriate skills. Other challenges include the waiting list for CAMHS and the transition from child to adult services.

7.6 Domestic Abuse/modern slavery

There are services in place to meet the needs of these groups, but they are not well co-ordinated. Modern slavery is a big issue. DBC would like to fund a safe house and a DA co-ordinator, and is bidding for funding under the new legislation.

7.7 Debt and benefits/money advice

There is a wide range of services offering debt and benefits advice, from Citizens Advice, other voluntary sector partners including the Community Trust, and the Council. There are also services to help those struggling financially, including community cafes and a foodbank.

Key challenges include changing attitudes to debt, with payday loans available at the touch of a button, and lack of knowledge for many about what to do if they do get into difficulties. Digital exclusion and welfare reform were also highlighted as key challenges. It was also noted that an increasing number of households live with volatile and unpredictable incomes because of changes in employment patterns.

Key actions include:

- Continuing to promote awareness of services available and importance of tackling problems early on
- Continuing to promote financial well-being/knowledge through all appropriate channels

7.8 Access to and sustaining tenancies in the private rented sector

The Council has a prevention fund which can support the payment of rent in advance and/or a deposit. Licensing is used to promote high standards and enforcement action taken against landlords where required. Other agencies provide support with white goods and also with budgeting.

As with many areas in the South East, the key challenges are the lack of affordable private rented accommodation and landlords being reluctant to take people on benefits.

There are no specific actions for the homelessness strategy but actions being taken under the housing strategy will help to ensure a supply of accommodation at affordable rents.

7.9 Homelessness, crime and prison

There is a lot of joint working to prevent and tackle homelessness amongst those being discharged from prison. There is a dedicated resource to engage with those being released and support them to find housing (although there is only one post across the County); and a number of schemes/projects which include accessing housing as part of wider support. A significant proportion of referrals under the Duty to Refer come from the police/prison officers.

Despite this, there remain significant challenges in ensuring engagement with the right teams at the right time, and resources are also limited. There are fewer services for female clients, and for lower level offenders. There are also strong links between crime and drug and alcohol abuse and the latter need to be tackled alongside dealing with homelessness arising from crime.

Key actions include:

- Investigating options for a specialist hostel
- Continue to work in partnership to focus on earlier intervention, communication and joined-up services

7.10 Engagement and information sharing across organisations

There is already an active homelessness forum and a number of other forums and working groups, such as the MARAC and MARP. It may be helpful to clarify the role and remit of some groups and ensure there are clear actions arising from meetings, and clear accountability. It is also important that homelessness remains on the corporate agenda.

DBC has recently agreed an information-sharing protocol with key partners but this is still bedding in and the strategy will need to reflect this.

Key actions include:

- Partners providing feedback to each other following referrals
- Exploring a system for sharing client information across organisations – one suggestion was the client 'owning' the support plan and being encouraged to share this with all the organisations with which they are working
- Exploring best way to provide an up to date directory of relevant services which all organisations can access
- Explore ways of utilising available information to predict homelessness, both in terms of overall patterns and for individual clients

7.11 Earlier prevention of homelessness

The service is already working to prevent homelessness in the vast majority of cases. Examples of what helps with this included prompt payment of benefits, access to DHP and other funding, partnership working and strong relationships within and across sectors.

Strengthening partnership working will be key to preventing and tackling homelessness and rough sleeping in the new strategy. While there is strong partnership working across many areas, this needs to move towards a shared collective responsibility with all partners.

There is also a need to reframe the relationship with RPs particularly on issues such as ASB, community safety and fire safety.

Key actions include:

- Capturing the risk of homelessness earlier due to effective sign-posting and referrals eg families with money worries
- Maximising attendance at partnership meetings such as the homelessness forum

8. Emerging themes to take forward into strategy

- Continue to work with partners to prevent homelessness wherever possible
- Improve access, security and stability within the PRS
- Provide tailored services to meet the needs of different groups
- Eradicate rough sleeping

Appendix One – feedback from survey

What barriers, restrictions or limitations do you currently face when delivering homelessness services?

- Complex behaviours
- Challenges in engaging key services due to lack of funding
- Drug issues, mental health and release from prison
- Lack of affordable rental options
- Stability of individuals / ability to manage their own budgets
- mental health & fear of 're-joining' society and the structure/rules/pressure it can bring - loneliness & isolation from community when in single occupation
- Relationship break down, loss of home due to rent arrears or security of tenure
- Mental health issues and difficulties in accessing services
- The Joint Strategic Needs Assessment for Homeless and Adults with Complex needs indicates that mental health, physical health, domestic abuse and substance misuse are the most common causal factors of homelessness. This would also be the case for families facing homelessness or at risk if homelessness.
- In the case of some 16/17 year olds – extensive waiting lists to access services

Are there any additional barriers to delivering your homelessness service, which you expect to become a challenge in the next 5 years?

- Those without public recourse
- Addressing underlying mental health needs when GP surgeries can take up to 6 weeks to access
- 8 month delays for mental health and occupational therapy assessments
- Lack of uncertainty about funding
- Other agencies resource challenges, impacting on service delivery
- There has a steady increase in the numbers of rough sleepers across all districts/boroughs in the last 5 years, and this does not show any signs of slowing.

What kind of resourcing challenges is your homeless service facing and how do these impact on the delivery of your service?

- Move on placements, adequate accommodation once the short-term accommodation has been utilised.
- Increase time in temporary accommodation
- Effective engagement and information sharing with key statutory agencies

Moving forward what support or help would benefit your homeless service?

- Provision beyond the homeless provision
- Access to immediate mental health support, such as specialised resource.

Thinking about your current clients, what are your three biggest challenges in terms of homelessness?

- People with substance misuse soon fall victim to their dealers and we get reports of ASB
- Mental Health - too much "voluntary" involvement with services so no proper support packages
- Repeat offenders who are not receiving robust sentences going in and out of prison all the time
- Provision of a community from which individuals can get support on their whole journey (i.e. beyond simply housing them)
- developing closer working relationships with agencies / charities who are specifically tackling homelessness - bringing 'hope' to clients
- Mental/Physical Health Needs.
- Previous Tenancy Issues
- Move on placements.

What are your 3 key priority areas for homelessness in the next 5 years?

- Addressing disjointed pathways
- Lack of clarity about thresholds across different statutory services
- Limited affordable housing
- limited availability of specialist provision for those with complex needs
- Reducing rough sleeping
- Improving targeted resources
- joined up strategic approach from both upper tier and lower tier authorities
- Improving integrated working to include front line social work and housing practitioners