

## Homelessness Strategy Update

We have undertaken a review of the Homelessness Strategy to ensure we are fully compliant with the requirements of the HRA. Below outlines the work undertaken to date on each commitment.

### **Commitment 1: Continue to build partnerships across different sectors and lead Dacorum's response to preventing and tackling homelessness**

- Our homeless Forum is chaired by our registered provider Hightown. It was previously chaired by Wendy Lewington the CEO of DENS who is now the vice chair. There has been increasing engagement from the voluntary sector, social services, Members, Clinical Commissioning Group, local Community Mental Health services and Police in tackling homelessness issues.
- Pathways for clients have been developed and commitment from all key organisations, which relates to Hospital Discharge; - Mental Health; - Prison; - Care Leavers; - Ex Armed Forces; - Domestic Violence.
- An internal service audit of The Elms was carried out in June 2018 to ensure contract compliance. Areas of feedback were provided to supplier to aid service improvement; no significant performance issues were identified.
- A communications plan is currently being developed to ensure that our partners and residents are aware of our response to homelessness, which impacts on the whole community, this is in line with the service plan and key priorities.

### **Commitment 2: Work together with partners and residents to understand the causes of homelessness and increase the help Dacorum services can offer**

- Funding has been awarded to enable development of a Housing First model to support people with complex needs experiencing homelessness into accommodation. This project is now up and running and has already housed some of the boroughs most complex individuals.
- This funding also included provision for a Dacorum outreach team that are working with rough sleepers. We also received separate funding for a dedicated outreach worker to work with rough sleepers with alcohol issues.
- The council's No Second Night Out Policy, which outlines our approach to tackling rough sleeping was reviewed in 2018 to ensure it remains fit for purpose.
- The service awarded grants of £10k of homelessness prevention grants to one of our Voluntary Sector Organisations in 2018/19 to prevent and tackle homelessness through outreach work. This grant was linked to the Cold Weather funding from MHCLG, this grant was approved by MHCLG and therefore funds spent have been claimed back by the Council.
- We have had two rounds of cold weather funding now that has put in increased provision for rough sleepers during the cold weather months including the extension of day centre hours and increased emergency crash-pad provision.
- Launched Tenant Academy in 2017, which allows DBC tenants and leaseholders as well as homeless people living in the Council's temporary accommodation to access training and skills courses.

### **Commitment 3: Improve access, security and stability in the private rented sector and help Dacorum residents remain in their home**

- Working arrangements with the Housing Benefit team have been improved. This has led to increased use of DHP to pay for deposits in the private sector.

- The Council had a contract with Westminster Drug Project and provided funding for Living Stable Lives to provide support in the private sector. They offered mediation and support for landlord/ tenant disputes to prevent homelessness.
- Following transfer of the statutory functions relation to private sector in January 2018, the team have been working closely with our internal and external partners to ensure that existing landlords with HMO properties adhere to the regulations, in addition we are currently increasing our level of activity in licencing properties under the new definitions. H&OSC have recently reviewed developments in this service area at committee in June 2019.
- The Council now pays rent in advance in addition to the deposits that was being paid.

**Commitment 4: Empower Dacorum residents to make informed decisions about their housing options**

- We improved our Enhanced Housing Options (EHO) toolkit so people can access housing advice at all times and ensured that all information is correct in line with HRA. Applicants can access the EHO and state what their housing issue is. The tool provides advice that is tailored to their needs and reduces need for direct contact with Officers.
- Clients are able to complete an online web form to gain a referral to Homeless Prevention and Assessment Team.
- The service is currently undergoing a review of the website content to make it easier for residents to access the EHO and information relevant to their situation.

**Commitment five: Reduce the effect of homelessness on young people and families**

- The service has continued to ensure that applicants are provided with access to safe, secure and suitable temporary accommodation, the service has not used bed and breakfast accommodation for young people and families with young children since June 2016.
- Funding is provided by the service to improve young people's understanding of 'living independently' by offering life skills workshops and housing eligibility. This funding also enables sessions in secondary schools to take place educating young people at an early stage about related homeless issues. This service is delivered by Herts Young Homeless and sessions are known as Home Truths & Next Steps. The aim of Home Truths is to raise awareness of the realities of homelessness and the support available, as well as to begin to consider the process of leaving home. The aim of Next Steps is also to prepare students for the realities of leaving home and moving to university or into their own accommodation. They also ensure young people have access to appropriate support following their experience of homelessness.