

HOMELESSNESS STRATEGY – 3 YEAR REVIEW

Strategic Objective One – Provision of Advice, Prevention of Homelessness and Broader Services

- The Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH) was established in 2016 as the single point of contact for all safeguarding concerns regarding children and young people in West Sussex which includes front door access for Early Help. It brings together expert professionals from services that have contact with children, young people and families to make the best possible use of their combined knowledge and resources to keep children safe from harm and promote their and their families wellbeing. It acts as a front door to manage all safeguarding referrals.
- A collaborative approach to partnership working with organisations including Transform Housing and the Citizens Advice Bureau (CAB) continues to deliver targeted support services to those in housing need.
- Work to support financial inclusion continues through the West Sussex Credit Union (WSCU) and the CAB debt advice service.
- With welfare reforms such as the benefit cap and universal credit introduced or imminent, encouraging and supporting clients to forward plan in light of these changes continues, but remains challenging as for many their finances are already stretched.
- Crawley Homes continue to offer the ‘buy back’ facility to households who purchased their social home but are no longer able to afford them. More generalised debt advice remains available through the CAB debt advice service.
- A multi-agency approach to enable effective partnership working to reduce the number of rough sleepers in Crawley continues to be effective.
- The outreach service within Crawley that actively seeks to assist rough sleepers continues to be provided by Crawley Open House.
- With the support of WSCC/CBC, Crawley Open House’s project ‘Team Around the Person’ (TAP) project continues to provide targeted support to homeless individuals. This has identified significant multi-agency savings and funding has been sourced for a further year.
- Upcoming legislative changes (including the Homelessness Reduction Act) look set to have a noticeable impact on the delivery of homelessness services.
- The prevention of homelessness through use of the private rented sector remains challenging and reliant on the provision of deposit bonds and funding rent in advance payments. The loss of a tenancy within the private rented sector continues to be one of the top two causes of homelessness in Crawley (as reported to the Council through the Housing Options service).

Strategic Objective Two – Supply of Affordable Housing

- Crawley’s housing market remains buoyant. With rent levels typically approx. 20% above Local Housing Allowance (LHA) rates, the private rented sector continues to be largely unaffordable to those on low incomes or housing benefit.
- Property prices continue to leave home ownership out of reach for those on low incomes (the average property price being nearly 10 times the average wage for Crawley).
- The delivery of affordable housing remains one of the key corporate priorities for the Council. The Council’s Local Plan, Crawley 2030 lays out how affordable housing is to be delivered across the Borough over the next 13 years.

- CBC continues to promote the delivery of new affordable homes through both an own-build and an enabling programme and has been successful in securing over 200 new affordable homes in 2016.
- The financial feasibility of including affordable housing units within housing developments continues to be contentious, and the Council maintains a robust and challenging approach in scrutinising viability to maximise affordable housing delivery.
- Use of permitted development rights to deliver housing has resulted in some sub-standard and poorly managed accommodation being developed that has continues to be a focus for ASB activity and a burden on local resources and services. A multi-agency response continues to address these issues.

Strategic Objective Three – Temporary Accommodation

- In partnership with Raven Housing Association, ten additional units of temporary accommodation have been delivered in Crawley within 2016-2017.
- Crawley Borough Council continues to explore temporary accommodation opportunities with West Sussex County Council and West Sussex Districts and Boroughs to ensure a strategic and cohesive approach to delivering temporary accommodation across all West Sussex District and Boroughs and improve outcomes for both the authorities and the customer.
- The Allocations Policy continues to be utilised as a prevention tool to increase mobility within the temporary accommodation portfolio and in doing so, minimise the use of (and time in) expensive nightly paid temporary accommodation.
- The increasing use of temporary accommodation within Crawley by other local authorities (including London Boroughs) occasionally results in difficulties sourcing placements at short notice. The Council continues to actively monitor this situation and to make appropriate representations.
- In order to respond to a rising need for temporary accommodation and the increased costs associated with this, an amendment to the Allocations Policy was piloted from September 2016. This has led to a significant reduction in the use (and cost) of nightly paid TA. To prevent numbers [in nightly paid TA] from returning to where they were, a recommendation will be made to Cabinet and Full Council to make changes to the Allocations Policy to make best use of social housing stock going forward.

Strategic Objective Four – Discharging the Homeless Duty

- The buoyancy of the local housing market continues to make accessing the private rented sector very challenging. Few agents accept clients who are on benefits and landlords are often unwilling to let to clients at the Local Housing Allowance rate (that remains frozen until April 2020). A number of authorities (mostly London boroughs) are offering cash incentives to landlords (in Crawley) to reduce rents and/or increase the fixed term of the tenancy. The Council has considered this approach but given the impact this can have in fuelling the local market, has not implemented it. The Council continues to work with landlords in providing non-financial incentives through a support and advisory offer.
- Private rented sector offer discharges remain challenging to achieve in the current housing market but nevertheless 10 such discharges were secured in 2016 – 2017.
- Temporary amendments to the Allocations Policy were piloted from September 2016 to increase our ability to discharge the housing duty of accepted homeless households. A report will be presented to Cabinet and Full Council making recommendations for future changes to the Allocations Policy to make best use of social housing stock going forward.