

Royal Borough of Greenwich Homelessness Review and Homelessness Strategy 2014-19

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Foreword

I am pleased to be introducing the Royal Borough of Greenwich Homelessness Strategy for 2014-19. Despite the significant financial challenges which the Royal Borough faces, we remain firmly committed to doing all we can to prevent homelessness through early intervention and targeted support.

Working closely with our partners, we have a good track record in minimising homelessness and the use of temporary accommodation, and in developing innovative services to tackle the wider causes of homelessness. From our unique integrated service centre for young people 'The Point', to our multi agency Welfare Reform Team, the Royal Borough has invested in new, exciting and innovative services that prevent both the human and financial costs of homelessness.

We can be proud to have reduced the number of households in temporary accommodation by almost 60 per cent between 2008 and 2013. We have ended the use of temporary accommodation for 16-17 year olds, and limited the placement of families into shared accommodation to below 6 weeks.

There are of course many causes of homelessness, and effective prevention requires a range of solutions that are not just about providing accommodation. We are also aware that investment in services that prevent homelessness has benefits for the health and well-being of our residents, and the prospects of our children and young people. This Homelessness Review has demonstrated the breadth of services, activities and partners involved in preventing homelessness in Royal Greenwich, and the value of this work to our residents and wider community.

The 2014-19 Homelessness Strategy is published at a challenging time for the Royal Borough. Homelessness is rising, particularly from the private rented sector. House prices for sale and for rent are increasing, whilst welfare reforms have reduced the amount that low income households can pay, pushing many out of the private housing market. It's within this tough environment that we set ourselves the challenge of improving the quality of private rented and temporary accommodation, tackling rogue landlords, reducing rough sleeping, and continuing to prevent homelessness through early intervention and support.

These are also very exciting times as we experience record levels of regeneration, new homes, jobs and huge transport infrastructure schemes such as Crossrail coming to the Royal Borough. We want to ensure that we maximise the delivery of affordable homes, through the developments taking place in major new growth areas at Woolwich Arsenal and the Town Centre, the Greenwich Peninsula, Kidbrooke Village and elsewhere.

We are also involved in a significant programme of building high quality bespoke homes for older residents, combined with schemes providing support for downsizing; we are also increasing the number of much needed larger families' homes.

Over the coming five years of this strategy Royal Greenwich will continue to put our energy and resources into preventing homelessness. This commitment has local people at its heart and we will work closely with our partners to continue improving the standard of accommodation and to achieving a truly Gold Standard homelessness service.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Chris Kirby', with a long horizontal line underneath.

Councillor Chris Kirby,
Cabinet Member for Housing
Royal Borough of Greenwich

	Content	Page
	Foreward	2
1	Introduction	5
2	National and Local Context	5
3	Royal Borough of Greenwich Homelessness Services Review of Achievements: Homelessness Strategy 2008-13	6
4	Housing Options & Support Services and Partnerships	7
5	Homelessness in the Royal Borough of Greenwich	8
6	Statutory Homelessness in Greenwich	9
7	Levels and Nature of Statutory Homelessness	10
8	Households Not Accepted as Homeless	12
9	Prevention of Homelessness	12
10	Supporting Vulnerable People	12
11	Rough Sleeping	12
12	Housing Supply	13
12.1	Allocation of Social Housing	13
12.2	Rehousing Homeless Households	14
12.3	Private Rented Sector	14
12.4	Future Supply of Affordable Housing	14
13	Responding to Welfare Reform	15
13.1	The Welfare Reform Team	15
14	Resources Available to Tackle Homelessness	16
15	Summary of Homelessness Review Findings	18
Royal Borough of Greenwich Homelessness Strategy 2014-19		
16.1	<i>Objective 1: Prevent Homelessness and Minimise Use of Temporary Accommodation</i>	18
16.2	<i>Objective 2: Increase the Supply of Good Quality Private Rented Sector Accommodation Available to People at Risk of Homelessness</i>	18
16.3	<i>Objective 3: Develop Partnerships and Integrate Services to Prevent Homelessness and Rough Sleeping, and Better Support People in Housing Need</i>	19
16.4	<i>Objective 4: Minimise the Impact of Welfare Reform on Greenwich Residents, and Improve Access to Employment Opportunities for People in Housing Need or at Risk of Becoming Homeless</i>	20
17	Consultation	22
18	Equality Impact Assessment	22

I Introduction

The Homelessness Act (2002) places a statutory duty on each local authority to carry out a review of homelessness and to develop a new Homelessness Strategy every five years.

The **Homelessness Review** provides a comprehensive assessment of the nature and extent of homelessness in the borough, as well as considering all of the activities and interventions in place to prevent homelessness and assist people who are or may become homeless. The **Homelessness Strategy** sets out how the Council will prevent homelessness and provide support to people who are homeless, or at risk of becoming homeless, during the coming five years.

This document provides a summary of the findings of the homelessness review, and sets out the key priority actions within the Royal Borough of Greenwich Homelessness Strategy 2014-19.

2 National and Local Context

The Royal Borough of Greenwich Homelessness Strategy is developed in the context of national policy and legislative developments, as well as identified local needs. These include:

- **‘Making Every Contact Count: A Joint Approach to Preventing Homelessness’** the Government’s cross-departmental report on tackling homelessness through early intervention, and integrated services. The report includes ten local challenges for local authorities to achieve the highest homelessness service standards, which have been incorporated into the Homelessness Gold Standard quality assessment framework.
- **No Second Night Out-** A strategy to tackle rough sleeping through early intervention to help people off the streets and into a place of safety immediately.
- **Welfare Reforms** which continue to have a significant impact on access to housing and homelessness, with numerous changes that reduce housing benefit and the ability to pay rent.
- **The Localism Act 2011** introduced significant changes to the Housing Act 1996, including giving local authorities more control of allocation policies and the power to end the homelessness duty with an offer of accommodation in the private rented sector.
- **The Greenwich Strategy 2006-15** sets out a vision for Royal Greenwich as a place with a vibrant mix of communities supported by quality housing, accessible transport links, vibrant open spaces, strong cultural attractions and a prosperous local economy.
- **The Core Strategy 2013 – 2028** guides future development in the Royal Borough and indicates the broad locations for future housing, employment, retail, infrastructure

and other land uses as well as providing detailed policies that will be used to assess planning applications.

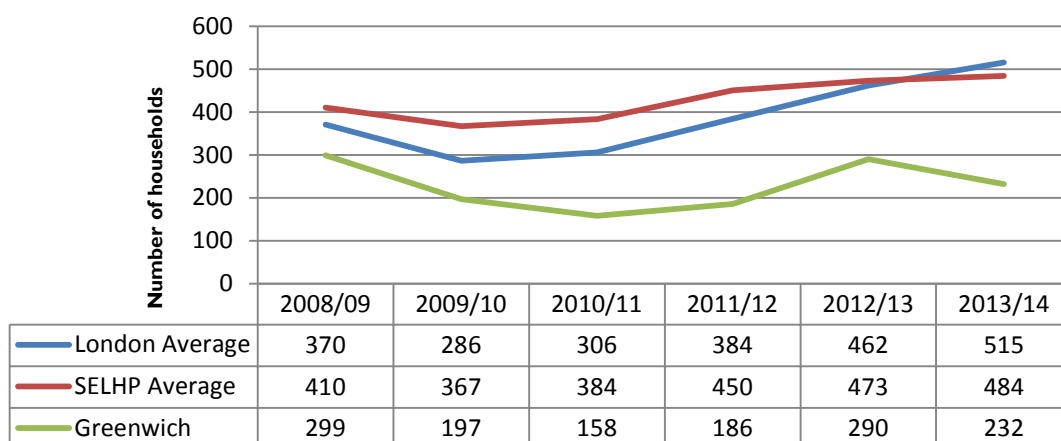
- **Royal Greenwich Housing Strategy** is in development, and the draft objectives set out the strategic objectives for addressing housing need and housing related services and support across the borough over the next five years.
- **Royal Borough of Greenwich Anti-Poverty Strategy (draft)** outlines the Council’s commitment to tackling poverty, supporting people into work and affordable housing. The Anti-Poverty Strategy also highlights the Council’s strong commitment to minimising the negative impact of welfare reforms on families and continuing to promote access to education, training and work opportunities as a way out of poverty.
- **The Greenwich Affordable Housing Partnership** of Registered Providers of social housing in the borough work together to deliver local priorities.
- **The Royal Borough of Greenwich Tenancy Strategy** sets out the type of social rented housing tenancies that the Royal Borough expects Registered Providers to provide in the borough. The Council has not adopted powers to reduce security of tenure for its tenants and the strategy sets out concerns about an approach that creates disincentives for tenants to increase their income for fear of losing their home.

3 Royal Borough of Greenwich Homelessness Services Review of Achievements – Homelessness Strategy 2008-13

The Royal Borough of Greenwich has made considerable progress in developing services and partnerships to tackle homelessness since the publication of the 2008-13 strategy. The achievements against the objectives of the previous strategy demonstrate the we:

- Maintained a low level of statutory homelessness acceptances and placements in temporary accommodation, when compared to the London and South East London averages.

Figure 1: RBG homelessness acceptances by year in comparison to London and SELHP Borough averages 2008-14



- Reduced the number of households in temporary accommodation by 57% between 2008 and 2013. The Council has ended the use temporary accommodation for 16-17 year olds and limited the placement of families into shared accommodation to below 6 weeks.

Table 1: Numbers in Temporary Accommodation and Acceptances

	31/03/2010	31/03/2011	31/03/2012	31/03/2013	31/03/2014	30/09/2014
Homeless Acceptances	197	158	186	290	232	181
Numbers in TA	157	171	235	211	293	404

- Established the Housing Options and Support Service to (HOSS) to combine advice, housing options and prevention, assessment and floating support functions and create teams based upon client needs and partnerships. The newly established Customer Access Team sees approximately 1,000 callers per month at The Woolwich Service Centre.
- Developed integrated services for young people based at The Point, which includes joint working between Housing, Children’s Services and other partners to prevent homelessness and improve outcomes for vulnerable young people. Services at The Point are part of a ‘Positive Pathway’ for young people, which has achieved national recognition as a model of best practise.
- Set up a Welfare Reform Team to proactively contact residents affected by the Total Benefit Cap and Spare Room Subsidy and to provide appropriate interventions to prevent homelessness, including through providing access to employment. By Sept 2014 the team had assisted 121 families affected by the benefit cap, into work and none had been accepted as homeless as a result of the benefit cap being applied.
- Established strong partnership based teams to meet the particular needs of clients with mental health problems, ex-offenders/people with a substance misuse problem, young people, rough sleepers and vulnerable families.
- Commissioned new supported housing services that better meet the borough’s needs, for young people, ex-offenders and people with substance misuse needs. We have also commissioned an improved refuge and housing support service to women who have experienced domestic abuse, including specialist provision for women with a substance misuse history.
- Developed effective working partnerships to ensure that newly homeless people have ‘No Second Night Out’ on the streets, and that rough sleepers with complex needs are assisted through multi-agency interventions and support.
- Built a strong Homelessness Forum and strengthened partnership arrangements to better support people at risk of homelessness.

- Provided access to settled housing for RBG residents. We have delivered 3395 affordable homes for rent and sale within RBG, between 2008-2014, of which 1100 are intermediate home and 2295 are rented.

4 Housing Options & Support Services and Partnerships

Following a restructure in 2013, the Council established a new service to manage homelessness and provide support to residents at risk of homelessness. The Housing Options and Support Service (HOSS) combined the housing advice, housing options and prevention, statutory assessment and floating support functions and created teams based upon client needs and partnerships. The HOSS ethos is to prevent homelessness through early intervention and support, and is reliant on strong and effective partnership arrangements.

Table 2: Royal Borough of Greenwich Housing Options and Support Service

HOSS Teams	Customers
Customer Access Team	All customers contacting HOSS for advice, information and assistance
The Private Sector Team (Housing Aid Centre)	Private sector residents (tenants and home owner) who are at risk of homelessness
Welfare Reform Team	Residents affected by Welfare Reform (Total Benefit Cap and Spare Room Subsidy)
Family Housing Options and Support Team	Families at risk of homelessness
1 st Base Housing Options and Support	Young People 16-24 at risk of homelessness
Single Peoples Housing Options and Support Team	Single People (households without children) who are at risk of homelessness
The Mental Health Options and Support Team	People linked to mental health services who are at risk of homelessness or are require support to move home
The Moving On Options and Support Team (MOST)	People with a history of substance misuse and/or offending, including specialist DV work
Older Peoples Housing Support Service	People aged 55+ who require housing support to maintain independence in their home
Performance and Development Team	All HOSS customers and stakeholders

5 Homelessness in the Royal Borough of Greenwich

Homelessness is a term that is used to describe various situations of housing need, and it is important to be clear about the different circumstances in which people are considered to be homeless. To summarise:

- **Statutory homelessness** refers to those people who have made a homeless application and have met the criteria in legislation (Housing Act 1996, Homelessness Act 2002) to be accepted by the Council as eligible for assistance (according to immigration status), homeless and in **priority need**. This includes families, pregnant women and single people who are particularly vulnerable. A household may be accepted as

'homeless' because they are going to be evicted or are living in accommodation so unsuitable that it is not 'reasonable' for them to remain there. The Council has a duty to provide temporary accommodation to statutory homeless households.

- **Non-statutory/non-priority homeless** people are primarily single people/childless couples who are not assessed as being in 'priority need' and are only entitled to 'advice and assistance' if homeless. These residents are offered advice about looking for private rented accommodation, accommodation agency lists, assistance to apply for rent in advance from the Emergency Support Scheme. Some non-priority homeless people are offered supported housing or access to our shared housing scheme managed through Thames Reach.
- **Rough sleepers** are people who are literally roofless and are bedded down on the streets, parks or other places where they may or may not be seen by the public. This group are a tiny minority of the much larger group of non-priority homeless people, as most single homeless people are 'sofa surfing' and are described as the 'hidden homeless' because we have no means to calculate their numbers. Housing legislation does not set out specific statutory duties to people sleeping rough, but there is a strong policy and funding focus on this group particularly in London where the numbers sleeping rough are growing.

6 Statutory Homelessness in Greenwich

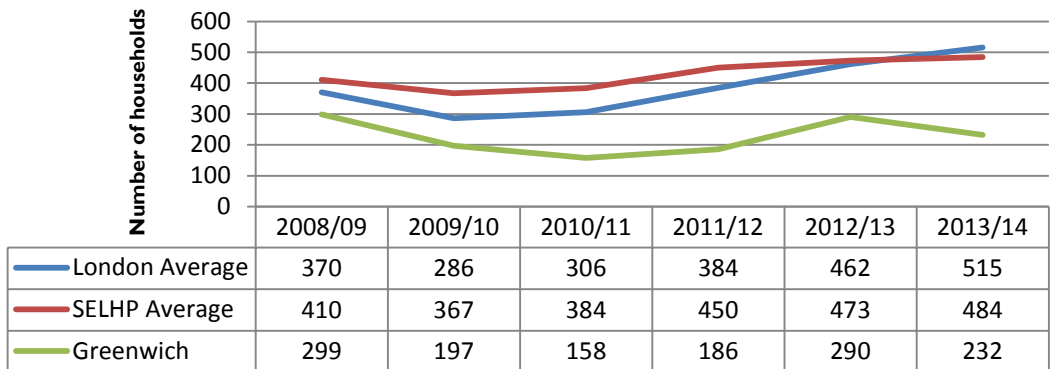
Applications for homelessness assistance are increasing, and the number of households in temporary accommodation has increased significantly during the past six months. Increasing demand for homelessness assistance are primarily the result of changes in the housing market experienced across London, as house sale values have risen and the amount of housing benefit available to private tenants is reduced through welfare reform. Private landlords have options to sell properties, or to let them to working tenants at a higher rent, and as a result the number of properties offered to let to residents reliant on housing benefit has reduced.

Around 15,000 households are on the housing register, 1200 of whom are priority cases, with 4000 new applicants registering for rehousing each year. As there are around 1800 council and housing association properties let each year, the availability of good quality private sector accommodation has been pivotal to meeting housing need. As set out below, the changes to the private sector and the shortage of suitable properties are key factors increasing homelessness demand.

The RBG Homelessness Review includes data on homelessness in the borough, demonstrating changes in the profile of statutory homelessness, reductions in the number of households in temporary accommodation and achievements in homelessness prevention.

The Council has continued to provide an effective response to prevent and reduce homelessness over the last five years and the number of statutory homelessness acceptances has fluctuated over this period. In comparison to our partner boroughs in the South East London sub-region and across London boroughs (Figure 2), RBG has maintained a relatively low level of statutory homelessness acceptances which reflects our success in actively preventing homelessness.

Figure 2: RBG homelessness acceptances by year in comparison to London and SELHP Borough averages 2008-14

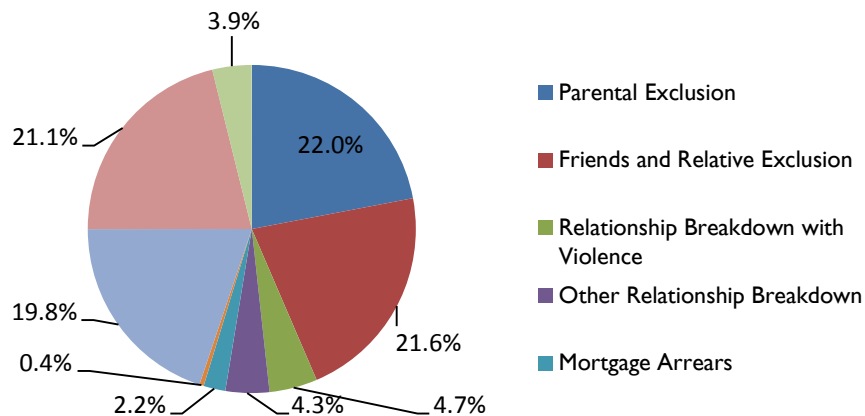


7 Levels and Nature of Statutory Homelessness

There have been some variances in the number of acceptances within the main homelessness categories over the years, due to both levels of homelessness approaches and other mitigating factors:

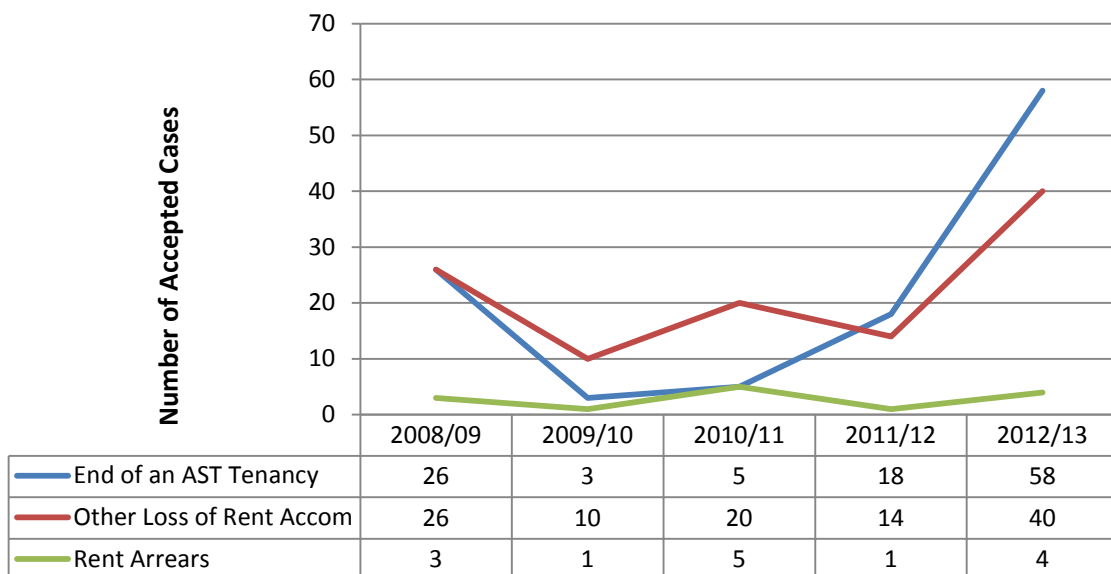
- People approaching the Council for assistance due to exclusion from ‘family and friends’ continues to constitute the major cause of homelessness in RBG. Although the presenting reason for homelessness is that the family have been excluded from the home where they have been living, these households will have a variety of histories or routes into homelessness and some may have been living with a family member or with friends for a relatively short period of time after becoming homeless from a previous address.

Figure 3: Reason for loss of last settled accommodation for those cases accepted 2013-14



- Parental exclusions also continue to account for a relatively high proportion of homelessness acceptances in RBG in comparison to other London boroughs. Typically, family exclusions arise where young adults remain in the home and start a family of their own and as a result the household becomes overcrowded and tensions inevitably arise. The Council's means to prevent this cause of homelessness are generally limited to the offer of private rented accommodation or rehousing through the Allocations scheme. However, the increasing demand for private rented and social housing limits the availability of alternative accommodation to young families living with parents, and the number of parental exclusions will inevitably increase.
- There has been a 45% overall increase in the number of households accepted as homeless due to end of assured shorthold tenancy between 2008 and 2013, sharply rising in 2011/12 and again in 2012/13. In 2013/14, 41% of households accepted as homeless had lost rented accommodation, compared to 20% of those accepted as homeless in the previous 3 years. Evictions from the private sector are a fast growing cause of homelessness, reflecting the changes in the private sector market. Many landlords report that they intend to sell their properties rather than let them, whilst others are wishing to let to professional people and are evicting residents reliant on increasingly limited housing benefit levels.
- Overall figures reveal that very few of those accepted as homeless have lost tenancies due to rent arrears, and an even smaller number are homeless as a result of repossession due to mortgage arrears.
- Only one person from the armed forces has been accepted as homeless in the last year and changes to the Allocations Scheme should prevent future homelessness from these residents.

Figure 4: Increase in Loss of Rented Accommodation



8 Households Not Accepted as Homeless

Most customers assisted through the HOSS are prevented from becoming homeless without the need for a statutory assessment and so the number of statutory applications and decisions does not reflect levels of potential homelessness in the borough.

- In 2013/4 5.1% of applicants were assessed as 'intentionally homeless'.
- 15.3% of applicants were found not to be in 'priority need' if homeless, which means that they were not assessed as being less able to fend for themselves if homeless than other homeless people.
- The number of households approaching who were found 'not eligible' for housing assistance increased from 1.9% in 2008/09 to 6.0% in 2013/14, reflecting the increase in residents from EEA countries who are not 'workers' and so are not entitled to homelessness assistance.

9 Prevention of Homelessness

The Council continues to actively prevent homelessness for most customers who contact our service, through a range of housing options and interventions. Data on homelessness prevention is set out in the full homelessness review document. Over the last three years the Council has consistently prevented over 1400 households per annum from becoming homeless, and in 2014-15 we anticipate the highest rate of preventions will be achieved.

10 Supporting Vulnerable People

Homelessness services in the Royal Borough of Greenwich are not limited to our statutory responsibilities. The Council aims to prevent homelessness through proactive interventions and support to customers, whether or not they are owed a full homelessness duty under housing legislation. The safeguarding and support needs of vulnerable groups are recognised within the HOSS, with specialist teams for families and other groups linked to the relevant partnerships.

The Homelessness Review summarises services provided and outcomes achieved for the many different groups of people who seek help because they are homeless or at risk of homelessness.

11 Rough Sleeping

The Government's target to end street homelessness by 2012 was not achieved and the number of rough sleepers has increased over the last few years, particularly in London. Greenwich, like other outer London Boroughs, had traditionally identified low numbers but has witnessed a significant rise in reported rough sleeping since the last homelessness strategy was developed.

The Council works with partners on initiatives to prevent rough sleeping:

- **No Second Night Out (NSNO)** is the GLA led initiative to prevent rough sleeping, by early intervention to assist new rough sleepers off the street. Following an assessment at the NSNO hub the client would be given a single service offer (SSO) detailing the best possible option to resolve their homelessness, often with reconnection to their home borough or 'social capital' to access housing and appropriate support and services.

- **No-One Living On the Streets (NLOS)** service launched in 2012, provides a 24/7 rapid assessment hub for those who are not new to the streets, linking them to short term accommodation. The emphasis of the service is to reconnect individuals into appropriate services as rapidly as possible, with short term accommodation being accessed where circumstances are more complex or an interim stay is agreed.
- **London Street Rescue (LSR)** provides the outreach service of staff and volunteers who find and verify people bedded down in the borough, and take them to a hub for assessment and further assistance.

Table 2: Verified Rough Sleepers in Greenwich

Year	Total
2008/2009	10
2009/2010	4
2010/2011	29
2011/2012	64
2012/2013	56
2013/2014	64

Of the 64 found rough sleeping in RBG during 2013/14, 50 were new to the streets and were offered services through the NSNO service. Of these, 26 people attended the NSNO Hub and 60% agreed to take up the 'Single Service Offer' of move on into private rented accommodation. Of the 64 rough sleepers, 26 were identified as having a local connection with Greenwich.

Most recent information about residents accessing services indicates that there is an increase in the numbers of rough sleepers with complex or multiple needs. This presents the Council with a number of challenges, particularly as there is no 'hostel' type accommodation providing a direct access service for rough sleepers.

An annual **rough sleeper count** is organised across London in November each year. In November 2013, the Royal Borough organised a rough sleeper count in which volunteers spent the night looking for rough sleepers at all known hot spots, and found one person sleeping rough. The previous count was conducted in 2010, and one person was identified.

12 Housing Supply

12.1 Allocation of Social Housing

In May 2014 there were **14,994** households on the RBG Housing Register, including 1,211 priority applicants. During 2013/14 there were **1784** permanent lettings, including 707 Registered Housing Provider (RP) properties and a further **103** lettings to sheltered flats. Although there has been a consistent level of lettings over the last three years, there are specific pressure points due to the scarcity of certain property types and sizes. In 2013/14, 446 of the properties that became available were 3 beds or larger when there were 3127 households on the housing register requiring properties of this size.

12.2 Rehousing Homeless Households

When the Council accepts a duty to assist a homeless household, the responsibility is to provide suitable temporary accommodation until such time as the duty ends. Typically the duty ends through the offer of permanent accommodation through the Council's housing register. However, in response to the new freedoms and powers provided through the Localism Act and local circumstance, the Royal Borough of Greenwich has implemented two policy changes which have significant impact on homelessness and delivery of services to homeless people:

- **A residency criterion** was introduced in June 2012, requiring applicants to have been resident in the borough for 5 years before becoming eligible to join the housing register.
- **The power to end the homelessness duty by an offer of suitable private rented sector accommodation** was adopted by the Council in November 2013, primarily to broaden the range of available housing options to reduce the length of time that families spend in temporary accommodation.

12.3 Private Rented Sector Housing

The economic downturn had an impact on the housing sales market in London, with a corresponding rise in private rented sector accommodation. More recently rising house price values and reducing housing benefit levels have resulted in landlords moving out of lettings to low income households, either because they are selling their properties or taking advantage of increased demand from working households who cannot afford to buy.

RBG understand that sufficient supply of good quality accommodation in the private rented sector is vital in order to meet housing need and prevent homelessness for both statutory and non-statutory clients. The development of both the RBG Landlord Accreditation and Licensing schemes is part of the bid to drive up standards in the private rented sector, and to attract landlords into working with the Council to accommodate people at risk of homelessness.

12.4 Future Supply of Affordable Housing

RBG are projecting that c.1300 new affordable homes will be built by 2015 and an opportunity for a further 1500 homes to be built between 2015-2018. There has been additional funding released for more homes to be built called "Building the Pipeline" scheme. It is to increase affordable housing supply and the GLA requires that all schemes are completed by 2015. In RBG the number of units to be delivered in 2015 will be further increased. Including the "Building the Pipeline" scheme, the total number of Affordable Housing expected to be delivered for 2014/15 is 1,024 units.

13 Responding to Welfare Reform

The Welfare Reform Act 2012 introduced a wide range of reforms aimed at reducing public expenditure on benefits and using the welfare system to incentive people toward employment and to ‘make work pay’. One of the stated aims of reform is to ensure that families on benefits should not be better off than the average working family. Welfare reforms also aim to reduce the costs of housing benefit to the public purse.

The elements of reform which most directly impact on homelessness are the Total Benefit Cap, and the Spare Room Subsidy (popularly referred to as ‘Bedroom Tax’), as they reduce housing benefit entitlement and so limit the household’s ability to pay the rent. Positive action to minimise the impact of reforms will also reduce homelessness.

13.1 The Welfare Reform Team

The Council implemented an approach to minimising the impact of welfare reform in advance of these major policy changes, including establishing a Welfare Reform Team (WRT) within the HOSS in 2012 and setting up an in house ‘Emergency Support Scheme’ to replace community care grants and loans. The approach that the Royal Borough takes to welfare reform which is consistent with our Anti-Poverty Strategy is to provide support and assistance to residents to access employment opportunities and to prevent homelessness.

Table 28: Household Affected by Under Occupation Benefit Reductions

Affected households - profile		As at Apr 13	As at Apr 14	As at Jul 14
1.1	Total number of households affected	3665	2683	2603
1.2	Number under-occupying by one bedroom	2685	2140	2087
1.3	Number under-occupying by two or more bedrooms	980	543	516
1.4	Council tenants affected	2302	1663	1602
1.5	RSL tenants affected	1363	1020	1001
1.6	Number of households with dependent children	1218	698	730
1.7	Total number of dependent children in affected households	2060	1142	1194

RBG achievements in assisting residents affected by Welfare Reform:

- The WRT has provided advice and information to 1515 residents, has completed holistic assessments with 74% of those affected by the Total Benefit Cap since September 2013 and has succeeded in supporting 102 individuals into work. No affected household has been made homeless as a direct result of the benefit cap.
- From April 2013-July 2014 151 RBG tenants affected by the under occupation benefit reduction were been rehoused into smaller accommodation, 71 moved through mutual

exchange and a total of 1032 RBT tenants have been assisted with Discretionary Housing payment.

- GLLaB has received 576 referrals of individuals affected by the welfare reforms or Families 1st clients. Of those referred since April 2013, 64% have actively engaged and of these 197 [54%] have been helped into work. 50 employers have committed to providing guaranteed interviews or jobs for the welfare reform/Families 1st cohort.
- As at July 2014, GLLP has provided work placements to 184 individuals, of which 53% were affected by the Total Benefit Cap before coming on the scheme. Participants in the scheme would have lost an average of £91 per week if they had not secured a placement, and just over 72% of participants left the scheme securing onward employment.
- The RBG Emergency Support Service has received 6,799 applications since the scheme commenced in April 2013, including 694 since April 2014. Just over 3,000 awards have been made.

14 Resources Available to Tackle Homelessness

The Royal Borough has invested resources from a range of funding streams into activity which have wholly or partly contributed to preventing homelessness and supporting vulnerable residents in housing need. Our approach to tackling homeless is based upon an **'Invest to Save'** programme, through which services that actively prevent homelessness are provided with funding, with the clear intention of reducing expenditure on temporary accommodation and statutory homelessness services. The following funding sources within the Council contribute to activity to prevent homelessness.

- Homelessness Prevention Grant
- Discretionary Housing Payments (DHP)
- Former Supporting People Funding
- Voluntary Sector Grant Budget
- Anti-Poverty and Welfare Reform Funding

RBG is proactive in identifying **external funding sources** that will add to our homelessness prevention toolkit and improve outcomes for people in housing need. Our successful partnerships which have brought in additional resources include:

- The Money House Project - led by Hyde Plus with RBG support, funded by Big Lottery
- Hospital Discharge Service - led by Thames Reach with RBG support, funded by the Department of Health
- Private Sector Access Scheme - led by Thames Reach with RBG support, obtained Crisis funding in 2011-13, and again in 2014-15
- Chaos Project - led by RBG and Thames Reach obtained DCLG funding in 2013-14.

In addition, RBG has been successful in attracting government funding due to our positive performance and innovative approaches to tackling homelessness. For example:

- RBG was one of 12 Enhanced Housing Options Trailblazers funded by DCLG from 2009-12

- RBG receives funding through the 'Positive Transitions' programme at DCLG, because of our excellent work on youth homelessness
- RBG is supporting DePaul in a bid for Fair Chance Funding to assist hard to reach 18-25 year olds, and is anticipating that we will be part of a successful programme
- RBG is preparing a bid for Platform for Life funding to the GLA, in partnership with YMCA. If successful we will be recycling a decanted two sheltered housing blocks to provide affordable housing for young working people.

15 Summary of Homelessness Review Findings

The preceding sections have set out the context, and identified trends in homelessness and the emerging needs to be addressed through a new Homelessness Strategy. The review findings can be summarised as follows:

- RBG has a strong track record in tackling and preventing homelessness through delivering holistic services through partnership, and integrated services
- RBG has achieved high numbers of homelessness preventions and minimised the use of temporary accommodation, particularly in comparison with other London boroughs with a similar level of deprivation and need
- Homelessness is increasing in Greenwich as across London, as access to private rented accommodation declines and the supply of social housing remains insufficient to meet need
- The number of private sector residents facing eviction is increasing as landlords exit the 'housing benefit market' due to the impact of welfare reform that has reduced benefit available to rent, alongside increasing demand from professional renters and a buoyant sales market
- The Council is firmly committed to tackling poverty, minimising the negative impact of welfare reform and improving standards in private rented sector housing. The new Homelessness Strategy must incorporate these priorities into an effective plan of action.

16 Royal Greenwich Homelessness Strategy 2014-19

16.1 Objective 1: Prevent homelessness and minimise the use of temporary accommodation

Our priorities:

- I.1 Develop a Gold Standard Housing Options service available to all Greenwich residents at risk of homelessness
- I.2 Prevent homelessness through housing support for vulnerable adults and for families
- I.3 Provide housing advice to minimise tenancy loss and repossession for private tenants and home owners

During the coming years, RBG will need to find innovative ways to increase and improve the accommodation options within an increasingly challenging housing market. With increasing demand for, and rising costs of temporary accommodation, the Council will invest in services that prevent and reduce homelessness. As homelessness from the Private Rented Sector continues to increase, it is considered a priority to provide pro-active advice and assistance to prevent tenants and home owners from losing their homes.

The Council intends to provide the highest standard in homelessness services and to achieve the Gold Standard accreditation during the first year of the strategy. The Gold Standard provides a toolkit for self-assessment and a quality framework for change which the Royal Borough of Greenwich has adopted as a means to achieve continuous improvement in our Housing Options and Support Service.

16.2 OBJECTIVE 2

Increase the supply of good quality private rented sector accommodation available to people at risk of homelessness.

Our priorities:

- 2.1 Increase numbers and quality of accommodation made available to prevent homelessness and to discharge the homelessness duty
- 2.2 End the use of temporary accommodation with shared facilities for families during the lifetime of the strategy
- 2.3 Increase the supply of good quality shared and HMO accommodation available to young people
- 2.4 Develop partnerships with private landlords and ensure a good supply of affordable accommodation available to homeless people
- 2.5 Complete a high intensity enforcement programme to bring HMO properties up to standard and implement additional licensing arrangements.

- 16.2.1 The Council has launched the Royal Greenwich Landlord Scheme through which landlords will be offered incentives to meet good standards of accommodation for people in housing need. This will work in tandem with a high intensity enforcement programme led by the Environmental Health Service to ensure those who are not responding to regulations are held accountable. In order to maximise the supply of private sector properties and influence landlords in improving standards, the Council will offer a number of incentives such as grants and loans, energy efficiency offers and assistance with minor repairs.
- 16.2.2 The availability of good quality private sector housing is vital in order to manage the level of housing demand and prevent homelessness. This also supports the Council's efforts to minimise the use of nightly paid accommodation and to end the use of accommodation with shared facilities. The reduction of temporary accommodation and particularly of unsuitable accommodation is therefore a key objective for this strategy. During 2014-15, the Council will invest additional funding into our Leasing Scheme in order to attract landlords able to provide good quality housing for use as temporary accommodation, as an alternative to non-self-contained units. We are also developing alternative temporary accommodation options on the Woolwich estates that are being decanted for redevelopment.
- 16.2.3 As the Council faces growing demands for assistance from homeless households, alongside a reduction in affordable housing available to let locally, the Royal Borough may need to revisit the possibility of offering properties outside the area to homeless households. The Council has adopted the power provided by the Localism Act 2011 to end the homelessness duty through an offer of private rented rather than social housing. The policy is currently targeted at households that are relatively new to the borough who do not qualify to join the housing register, but are owed a statutory homelessness duty. During the lifetime of the new Homelessness Strategy Members will need to review whether our policy could include offering properties outside the borough, or even outside of the capital, in order to respond to growing demands for homelessness assistance. Such an approach has been adopted out of necessity by other London boroughs that have been unable to meet local demand within their own social housing and private housing stock.

16.3 OBJECTIVE 3

Develop partnerships and integrate services to prevent homelessness and rough sleeping, and better support people in housing need.

Our priorities:

- 3.1** Complete joint commissioning of services that provide effective housing and support pathways for vulnerable people in housing need
- 3.2** Continue to develop pathways and integrated services to support homeless families and children, older adults, people with mental health needs, ex-offenders, people with a substance misuse and women at risk of domestic violence
- 3.3** Build and develop partnerships to deliver intensive support to vulnerable adults with multiple complex needs
- 3.4** Minimise rough sleeping through partnership interventions to ensure there is 'No Second Night Out' for single homeless people.

16.3.1. People can become homeless, or be threatened with homelessness for a variety of complex reasons that often require specialist accommodation and support to resolve their housing problems. The reasons for homelessness can be complex and multifaceted; to tackle it requires a broad alliance of statutory and non-statutory partners working together. We are committed to developing a framework that all our partners can actively support. Where possible we will seek to integrate statutory and non-statutory, voluntary sector support to develop a holistic approach to tackling homelessness in Royal Greenwich.

16.3.2. One of the national strategic aims is to end rough sleeping and the Government asks that all authorities provide an estimate or count the number of rough sleepers in their borough each year. The Council will continue to undertake initiatives with partners, such as NSNO and SELHP single homelessness programme to tackle rough sleeping.

16.3.3. With the positive outcome of the Fair Chance bid, we will support the delivery of the 'My Chance' service, to assist young homeless people with complex needs into housing and employment.

16.3.4. It is established that homelessness can lead to people developing health issues. We will therefore ensure that the needs of homeless people are understood by the Health and Well Being Board and partners involved in commissioning health and social care services.

16.4 OBJECTIVE 4

Minimise the impact of welfare reform on Greenwich residents, and improve access to employment opportunities for people in housing need or at risk of becoming homeless

Our priorities:

- 4.1** Deliver multi agency interventions to assist residents affected by welfare reform to maximise access to employment and prevent homelessness
- 4.2** Prepare for the implementation of Universal Credit, working with partners to develop support for vulnerable residents affected
- 4.3** Develop accommodation options for young people that prevent homelessness and support engagement in education employment and training
- 4.4** Increase access to employment support for families and vulnerable adults who are homeless or at risk of homelessness.

16.4.1 Welfare reform has impacted on the ability of many RBG residents to meet their housing costs and for some to access suitable housing. The Council's Welfare Reform Team is a collaboration of staff from Housing, GLLab and Job Centre Plus, who work alongside families to prevent them becoming homeless by providing pathways to employment.

16.4.2 The Housing Options and Support Service and Children Services (CS) work in partnership at The Point to provide an integrated one stop shop service to young people around advice, assessment and support to meet their various needs. The young people's housing service 1st Base @ The Point also acts as a gateway to all supported housing in the borough, and participated in designing and commissioning new services to best meet identified needs. All commissioned services are required to prioritise support to access education employment and training within their service model.

16.4.3 Under Universal Credit, which is expected to be fully implemented by October 2017, working-age tenants will receive a single monthly payment directly from the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP). This will include their support for housing costs, but unlike the current system housing payments will not be paid directly to landlords unless categorised as 'vulnerable'. There is concern that that some working-age people will not be capable of managing a monthly payment and will be in danger of falling into rent arrears as a result. An additional concern is financial exclusion; a significant percentage of tenants do not have a bank account and therefore would not be able to pay rent by direct debit. The Council will continue to deliver co-located services to minimise the impact of welfare reform and to prevent homelessness as a result of any of the changes.

17 Consultation

To develop the new RBG Homelessness Strategy a range of consultation exercises have been undertaken with staff and colleagues and partners as listed below:

- 3,009 households, postal survey and also online access to the survey - Sept 2014
- Face to Face survey - Landlords Business Club (7 Landlords) - 1 April 2014
- RBG - Housing Options and Support Service – Managers and frontline Staff consulted during February/March 2014
- Adult Joint Commissioning Group (Substance Misuse) - 13th March
- Greenwich Registered Provider Partnership Executive Group - 10th April
- Mental Health Joint Commissioning Group which was attended by DAOPs, Public Health, NHS Greenwich and Bridge MH Service - March 2014
- A half day consultation event was held on the 3rd April 2014 with 41 delegates from voluntary and community groups, housing, health, social care sectors and support providers.

A consultation summary has been produced which encompasses the main feedback received. All the comments and suggestions through the consultations exercises have been duly considered and where appropriate have been used to inform the strategy and the action plan.

18 Equalities Impact Assessment

An Equalities Impact Assessment has been undertaken of the RBG Homelessness Review and draft Homelessness strategy 2014-2019 to ensure that there are no adverse effects for any particular group. The strategy in itself sets out the strategic priorities which will be delivered to prevent homelessness and respond to those in housing need. It has relevance to equality because it impacts on the boroughs most vulnerable people, who are over represented amongst the 'equality groups'. As the overarching aim of the strategy is to prevent homelessness and to support vulnerable people, the delivery of the actions identified will have positive impact for BME, disabled and vulnerable, young people and women, all of who are over represented amongst those who are at risk of homelessness.

For Further information, please contact:

Performance & Development Team

Royal Borough of Greenwich

Woolwich Centre

Woolwich

London

SE18 6HQ

Email: Housing-Performance@royalgreenwich.gov.uk

Tel: 020 8921 4823

